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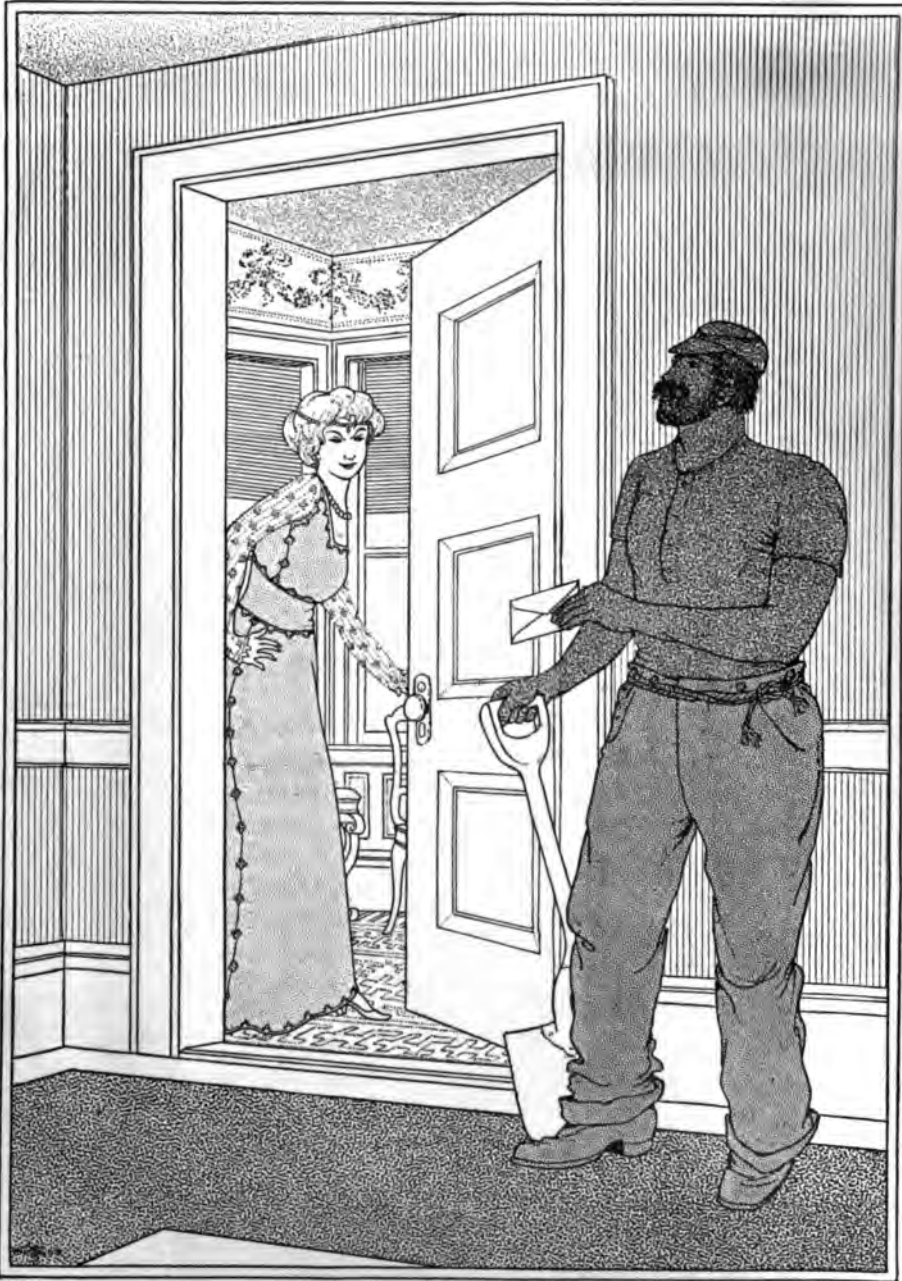
Lady Méchante

“O, thou hast been a most prodigious comet!”

(The White Devil)



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Lady Méchante

or

Life as it Should Be:

Being Divers Precious Episodes
In the Life of a Naughty Nonpareille

A Farce in Filigree

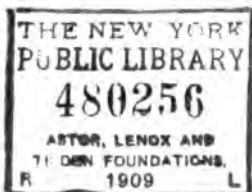
By GELETT BURGESS

Author of "Vivette," "Are You a Bromide?"

"The Maxims of Methuselah," &c.

With Illustrations by the Author

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NEW YORK



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WORLD WAR
CLUB
WARD



October, 1909

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.



TO THE WHILOM
ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF
“PHYLLIDA”
AND
“LE PETIT JOURNAL DES REFUSÉES”
FELLOW ENTHUSIAST AND PARTNER IN
MANY ACTS OF UNREGRETTED FOLLY
CRITIC — ARTIST — FRIEND
THIS ABANDONED NARRATIVE
IS CORDIALLY DEDICATED





PORTER GARNETT, ESQUIRE,

SIR:

If I adopt the old-world manner in formally inscribing to you this last fantastic product of my mad-witted endeavor, and build a needless portico upon that monstrous Temple of Frivolity which you have entered so often with me and which I have been overlong erecting, you will, I am sure, count it as of a piece with my customary impertinence, and smile good-naturedly enough at my gambado. Were I to push this inscription home to you I could, no doubt, justify the liberty I now take by acclaiming you as an enthusiastic co-laborer in many an act of desperate and inconsequent trifling. It is more than likely, however, you will be by way of accusing me of lagging and shirking, swear that the metropolis has dried a mind that the wind from the Pacific urged to action; that, in short, New York has tamed me. For this I have but to plead too guilty. My Lady Méchante has all but died of inanition. This seven years she has fainted at the window of my soul, looking in vain for a rescuer. And yet, this very effete coast first gave her

LADY MÉCHANTE

birth; she is of the Atlantic, which should cause you to revise your theories.

I prefer, though, to rest upon your indulgent approval of that same lady, my heroine, and your appreciation of my efforts to make her what she should be to satisfy a certain whim we have in common. You have been complaisant enough with her errantries to dub her Nonparella, and to give her your guaranty of a precious, if a faint and wan immortality. Alas, there shall be few who are minded to the same opinion! He must wear rare spectacles, nowadays, who does not see categories wherever he looks, and this essay is too personal to be classed with any of the schools. (Most humbly do I wear my garland of conceit.)

There is, however, a third consideration which demands your name upon this page. You are, happily for me, of my caste. We possess the same terminology; we talk without speaking; we use the same shrugs and smiles. But this letter is to go forth to others; let it stand, therefore, as our cartel to the world. We have stood for Nonsense per se, you and I; we have named it the Fourth Dimension of Literature. We have found it akin to music in its subtle, esoteric reactions. We have, so far, practised it for itself—for a mere sensuous delight in an occult Style. But of the higher Nonsense, what? Is it debased by the adulteration of Satire and Parody? Faith, we have been recusant, you and I, who have been for an unmixed art. Now, if I back-slide, if I step on some toes a-purpose, will you follow



DEDICATORY LETTER

me? For I started with you, blithely, without a destination, and ended galloping into town. Perhaps you, of all the world, are still alone. But I must go where my steed carries me.

Nevertheless, you know my distinction between Fancy and Imagination, quote your Poe as you like — well, I am in such wise for Fancy, having had my sting with Experience. No doubt it is but to reconcile my conscience, in despair of Chestertons who achieve all my abandon and more than my theses; yet still the chance to be sui generis must be taken, since my Lady Méchante has found favor in the sight of a publisher. Is the thing worth doing? Shall a smile suffice for my reward? I am sure only of yours!

I shoot my arrow into the air, but I shall find it, at last, in the heart of a friend. For we are of the gargoyle's kin, you and I. We know that there is a reverse of beauty, not ugliness, which is the inverse. We have studied its laws, which few have known since the spirit of wonder died from men. And as with art, so with literature; men can stand on their heads, but they may not get through the looking-glass. Let's draw nearer modern music, perhaps, and try in some such way for emotions, though they be thin and frail.

And if I ape the Elizabethans, past masters, for so small, so vapid a purpose, it is but to strive for the impossibility of a freedom that lasted while books were few. A word was slang to-day, and to-morrow, lo, it was literature! No patented phrases, no balanced

LADY MÉCHANTE

periods, and all form inchoate! What's left to do? Everything, till our Academy comes in to decree the murder of our mother-tongue — and so, have at it, and strive once more, even though one is caught striving. Better precious than patterned, say I. What's a sentence to be afraid of? If all the squares, triangles, and circles are invented, I'll try an irregular polygon! Full well you know the rules of the game when I play with my words.

So it was you who gave me a hoist to the saddle and a flick at the flank of my steed; it was you who, in your sober fashion — creature of fierce extremes — bade me God-speed with the stirrup cup. You have watched me break my neck before; haply you'll be at the hurdle to help me up. At least, technician, purist, academe though you be, you are also as mad as I, my friend, as mad as jade and Ho-ku; and I trust you to grin at my raised airs and watch my high manège until my fall. For you, then, my curvet and capriole, my volt, demi-volt, caracole, and curvet. I ride my smock-rampant with bridle slack!

GELETT BURGESS.

NEW YORK, APRIL 1

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To the Indulgent Reader

SUCH helter-skelter rigamarole as this is a pudding that needs a rare sauce of indulgence to drench its wild taste; though if you will, it should still be eaten hot from the spoon. These be parlous days for the stylist when a new-shaped phrase or a crooked word makes the girls jump a page, hoping to light on sober verity. Now, though I writ this with my left hand while my wits were astray over the candle, though my Lady have no soul and my book no manners, you must not think Fancy may not have her way, too, in this arid time, if she but knock on the right door. One may create as well as construct, and there are bricks not made of experience. Nor do such airy castles always perish in the night.

So, though all this happened before Holywell Street fed the Strand with its trickling stream of antiquity, ere San Francisco became unpicturesque with iron frames, while yet the Boston Symphony rehearsed in the old Music Hall, and before the Metropolitan tower had carried New York's exclamatory note in architecture uptown — Romance does not die, and there is still material for Fancy. My tale needs not verisimilitude to sustain its life; let my grandchildren bear me out.



ADVERTISEMENT

If you are for a fiction plugged with propriety, sobriety, and the Magazine virtues, with sincerity, conviction, and all that, go soak in the monthlies! the periodical orthodoxy of the day. But if you have antennae, if you are for the far ends of the spectrum, if you can count corpuscles, I cry you mercy when you see where abandon may go, withal, and how a teaspoonful of brains might butter this fragile custard. Some quodling will do it yet, I dare say, and to him Lady Méchante holds out the delicate tip of her pink little finger! Well, she seemed a most prodigious comet as I let her in, but even this impertinent tale has had its face slapped for its laggard blood. She bade me drink her adjectives, and she turned my sentences downsideup, but even then the story fell into the rut seven times too often. Never mind, here 's for the diversion, now: it may not run away with you, but it may point a sermon for some bigger fool than I.

Lady Méchante

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Book One

THE CAD
AND THE COUNTESS

What's here? Poetic fury and historic storms!
(Volpone; or, The Fox.)



Chapter One

A BURGLAR'S WIDOW

And by gadslid, I scorn it, I, so I do, to be a consort for every bumdrum; bang 'hem, scroyles!

(Every Man in his Humour.)



AT the age of three-and-twenty, Mrs. Florizelle Gaillarde found, among her charms and tokens, item: a flamboyant youth which had at last got its second wind in the rather splendid pace she had set for herself, and, to this, a nimble wit sharpened to a wire edge by alternate poverty and wealth; also a footing in the *beau monde* won by finesse, the attainment of which scarce repaid her for the struggle. She had, moreover, a sense of the Relative Importance of Things by which she was able to classify her desires and to lay a tiny curly finger upon her nearest wish. First, then, she touched Romance; for, despite her variations of social altitude, neither Time nor Fortune had yet brought to her door an Interesting Man.

The experience of this ruddy-haired whimsically-smiling devilette with the arched eyebrows had been various. A double dose of matrimony had not tamed her; her mind and her heart were still virgin. Her first spouse was a certain Baron of Bayswater, who had achieved importance in the later Victorian Beerage for his movement towards the abolition of the British barmaid. It need hardly be added that he was unpopular, although his Lady suffered

LADY MÉCHANTE

no loss of prestige. Even the hospitals he had founded repudiated him. Ostracized by the hideous violence he had done to public opinion, he died soon afterward, and his widow followed him into obscurity on account of her romantic attachment for Leopold Gaillarde, a picturesque burglar whose fingers were better developed than his brain.

While her second husband had lived, life had gone, in a way, merrily enough, for his profession (he was a swell "cracksman" of acknowledged ability) had savored their nights with the truths that are stranger than fiction; but even then she was by no means satisfied. No matter how picturesque a man's trade may be, if he is not of the fibre of fancy, he grows dulled sooner or later to the beautiful opportunities of his vocation, and inevitably he gets to taking his emotions cavalierly. Leopold did his poor best to satisfy his wife's idealism, but he was internally cursed with the fatal quality of "meaning well." Though after the honeymoon he had given himself up to her empire, she had never really succeeded in scanning any poetical quality into the bald prose of his profession. Such things must come intuitively, and Leopold was a hopeless Uitlander to the fate-marked aristocracy of pure Romance.

He was a clever burglar, as burglars go, but he had more of the artisan than of the artist in him. His fingers were facile, but his fancy faint. He dabbled in wee sensations; he was quick enough at a hint, but slow to see for himself, at a *clin d'œil*, what risks were raw, what ripe, what rotten.

Mrs. Gaillarde, who had an infinite capacity for being bored and a still greater facility for rescuing herself from such dilemmas, had not poisoned Leopold, however near



A BURGLAR'S WIDOW

she may have come to it in that first year after marriage which is said to be a purgatory of marital adjustments. She had never adjusted herself; the process was rendered unnecessary by Leopold's encounter with a policeman named Slithery, who emptied four shots into the burglar's stomach. Leopold never digested the pellets, and, four days afterward, Mrs. Gaillarde was a widow. She bobbed up merrily at Madame Qui-Vive's, under her previous title, and said nothing of her second experience in matrimony.

After his death, Florizelle, who in her salad days before the *mésalliance*, had been a regularly apprenticed débutante in the service of Madame Qui-Vive, was enabled, thanks to her departed husband's industry, to take up again her card-case and lorgnette, brougham and liveries, and enter London society through the Gate of Affluence as a sort of journeyman *mondaine* to practice the mechanics of high-life amenities.

The assumption of the old-new routine, however, entailed many onerous punctilios that chafed her more mature enthusiasm. The receptions to which she was invited were dull, the dinners homicidal. She found that her associates played at the game of Society now with the stolidity of whist fiends competing for points and prizes rather than with any true sporting instinct. In short, she had returned to her world to find one dimension gone. Her sphere had become a mere circle, with longitude and latitude, but without depths of possibility.

She might have escaped, it is true, by staying away from such mummeries had she not unwittingly fascinated a dozen or so frock-coats, who, before she was aware of the invasion, came a-vaulting the walls of her Mayfair Street privacy and trampled the garden of her domestic life. They would not come on her "days," but persisted in



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dropping into her seclusion to bore her one by one. It was useless to forbid them entrance; they lay in wait for her at every corner. The worst of it all was, that what agile wits there were among them were frightened away by this siege, and Florizelle was encompassed by a retinue of slow-minded retainers whom it was impossible to discourage. Her back yard was littered with the bouquets that she flung with impetuous adjectives from her morning-room windows, and her maids grew affluent on ancillary arles. Lady Méchante was forced to live a large portion of her time in her brougham in order to escape the insistence of her satellites.

Despite all this, the gayety of the town held the charming widow captive, for she was city-bred and disdained the unspiced flavor of rural joys. She could no more deny herself the stimulus of gas-lit frivolity than she could refuse her lips the invisible aid of vermeil. She was a creature who craved exotic intellectual sensations. As she was clever and imaginative, she could not help seeing all about her the avenues of Indiscretion which led to tiny twilight paradises, little carousels of fashion, into which her comrades strayed, hand in hand, questing adventure; but these were not for her. She was for a marvel; the caverns of her joy must be not stucco but crystal and ruby.

She thought time and again of flinging away her fortune and making for the purlieus again, but the memory of her former society checked her; she did not like second-story men, she found forgers and counterfeiters, cracksmen and confidence sharps, all one-sided and vulgar. There were, on the contrary, many men in the world polite whom she would welcome into her acquaintance if they could be induced to come, but they would not come. In short, she



A BURGLAR'S WIDOW

longed to pick her own friends as men used, and to be free to go and come at will among them, without card or caution.

But she lacked the precise impelling motive till, at a dinner given by Madame Qui-Vive, she found herself taken in to table by a man whose face seemed piquantly suggestive. She tried to pick up, in her memory, his name from the mumble that had served as her introduction, but except that it began or ended with an "R," she found nothing to prompt her. She read his name on the card beside his plate. It was "Mr. Guy Bounder."

She said, then, as he began his oysters with the wrong fork, "Mr. Bounder, I seem to recall your face, as of one I have known, but I cannot put you quite in your place in that rogues' gallery of my mind. Something in your *gaucherie*, too, cries out for recognition; a certain slipshod habit of your attire, an unpleasant though familiar expression in your eyes, proclaim you an old friend, but I am at a loss to class you. If you have this stolen property of mine, I pray you return me my recognition."

"I thank you a thousand times for your insults," said Mr. Bounder, dropping his serviette and planting a kiss upon Florizelle's carelessly dropped hand as he stooped to pick up the linen before the waiter could intervene. "I thank you, since it proves you really are what I had suspected; you are Florry Gaillarde!"

Lady Méchante nearly swooned. "But your name!" she cried, in a tone that brought twenty eyes jumping toward them, hurdling the lighted candlesticks to throw themselves mercilessly upon the pair.

"I call her Emily, only Emily, and she has just commenced to talk!" he replied with rare presence of mind. "Only the other day she toddled in, and said —"





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But by this time the inquisitors had turned their attention from the two, and he resumed with more adulation, "Surely you remember 'Mustard,' the hero of the Belgrave Square job? I remember your own congratulations one evening at the Burglars' Ball! And so poor Leopold is dead? I suppose you keep on with the business?"

"What, in heaven's name, do you mean?" said Lady Méchante. Then, turning to the human being on her left, she murmured, "No, I have n't been to the theatre for two days! 'The Atom' was so clever that it absolutely exhausted me. . . . Yes, you must come and see me! I am always at home on the fifth Wednesday in February, from eleven to quarter-to-twelve. . . .—No, really?" And then, to Mr. Bounder she added, "Is it possible that there is a profession that my sex has not adventured? Are there, then, female burglars?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Mr. Bounder, "but I thought that one of your Ladyship's attainments and cleverness would have profited by your husband's tutelage."

"I am no Lady," said Florizelle. "I have dropped the sobriquet. Here are ladies around you; do you confound me with such waxwork? But seriously, you have, for once, put an idea into my head. No, no; not that there was not plenty of room," she added; "but that *you* should have done it!"

"I could find you the necessary tools," said Mr. Bounder. "I have myself a silver-mounted set that I would willingly place at your service." The love-light had stolen into his face.

"It is not that—it is not even the lack of familiarity with the old-time 'fences,'" she said, casting down her eyes. "I have not lost my proficiency. See here!"



A BURGLAR'S WIDOW

As he looked, she abstracted the gold watch from her neighbor's pocket, while she feigned to reach for the celery.

"Ah, yes; I remember that trick well," said Mr. Bounder, accepting the little token of old friendship. "I once waltzed with you!"

"Do not mention it," the widow replied, summoning a blush. "It was such a little thing to do for a friend. I am sure you profited by it in the long run. But this is the point: I am bored. Frankly, dull as you are, you are a Haroun-al-Raschid compared with these half-witted objects here. You have — unwittingly, I acknowledge — pointed out to me an avenue of escape. You still love me?"

"Madly," murmured Mr. Bounder.

"Then accept your reward! Kiss me!" She slightly inclined her head.

"What ho! Before all these people?" cried Bounder.


"You are a poor fool," said the little widow. "One does not offer such a favor twice. You have lost that one forever. But you still have the watch, and it will stand you ten quid at least. Let that suffice. As for me, I have found my career. The world shall once more hear of Lady Méchante!" And, though the *entrée* had just been served, she rose and left the table.

In this wise did Mrs. Florizelle make her dignified exit from Society.

Chapter Two

A SENTIMENTAL FELON

Ye dross, ye powdered pigsbones, rhubarb glisters!
(Thierry and Theodoret.)

T was not long before Lady Méchante's prestige had flooded the crepuscular sub-world of extra-ritualistic functions; for, among that Submerged Tenth, her skill and daring, combined with the compulsion of her ardent nature and lambent temperament, would have insured her leadership even if she had not had the handicap of Leopold's connection with the profession. She had no need, then, to begin with Shoreditch or the Newington Causeway, and, though she was known and feared at the "Elephant and Castle," her fame jumped boldly into the secret councils of Soho. In the empire of Crime and Adventure women have larger rights and lesser privileges, so she threw off the insistence of chivalry; she was no longer over-sexed, she had become an Economic Factor, taking her place as an equal.

London, indeed, soon began to hear of Lady Méchante, as she had predicted. She fitted modern methods to modern needs, and, not content with harassing the better known districts of Society, she became an explorer and laid her tribute upon new territories. Her ablest accomplice in this work was Guy Bounder, who, though a child compared with her, in the field of invention, was familiar with the



A SENTIMENTAL FELON

machinery of the profession, having kept in touch with affairs while she was rusting in the aristocracy.

But, though it is not of these industries that our tale is concerned, let us mention some of her more important departures. First among these came her innovations in the scandal market; she replaced the private detective in important divorce proceedings, and became a purveyor of sensation to the more lurid journals. Her skill in breaking and entering gave her marvelous proficiency and usefulness to her clients, but by reason of her intimate familiarity with the classes, she was enabled to select and obtain what ordinary thieves would hardly have noticed. She did, it is true, pick up a rare first edition here and a particularly attractive etching there, but this was mere by-play.

Yet, in spite of these activities, and too many more to describe, she lacked adventure of proper quality to satisfy her multiplex necessities. Guy Bounder and her lesser associates she saw as through the wrong end of the opera-glass — small, sharply set in a wonder-world of insignificant emotions, delicately colored, but cold and unreal. After all, they were no more worth while than her five-o'clock frock-coats. They were indurated; the crust of their professionalism could be broken into by no pang of novelty, nor by the stabs with which the mad-hearted little Florizelle sought to pierce their calm.

Still, she knew that there were men worth while knowing, and if they attended neither the ordeals of Belgravia nor the occult processes in Soho, she must find them out at home. What use was her marvelous capacity if she must be balked of such glorious booty as the acquaintance with an Entertaining Man? A lively appetite for originality grew into a hunger unbearable, and from that to an intel-



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lectual starvation. Such was her London. It has been many another's.

She was lunching at Dieudonné's one day, saucing her duck with such reflections, when a gentleman entered who probed her curiosity to the quick. Here, possibly, was one of the three interesting men in London. The unknown seated himself near her table and proceeded to give evidences of taste and originality. His judgment of the *menu* was of a hair-trigger accuracy and swiftness; his order was sharp without being hurried, and his treatment of the waiter and the waiter's treatment of him exhibited patently the importance of the guest, both to the community and to himself. Lady Méchante could not help contrasting such individuality with Guy Boucher's nonentical rule-of-thumb *savoir faire*. Guy, too, had a rabbit lip, with the chin of a lizard; he had a rush of teeth to the mouth, and yet she spent her time with him and his commonplaces when she might have been collecting such patrons as this genius for her *clientèle*. Surely she had lost much time!

She gave the word to her groom upon leaving, and an hour later received the information that the man was a Mr. Saul Edam, living at No. 67 Knightsbridge, and that he carried on business as an East India warehouseman in the city. The last item was a shock to her, yet the attraction of his personality drew her, and she persuaded herself of his worth by many feminine excuses. That very night, indeed, she set out; she was not one to linger long while her egg cooled.

"I will do him the honor of robbing him with my own hands," she said to herself, "and, incidentally, I will find out what manner of man it is who has hands like that and



A SENTIMENTAL FELON

who wears a brown that is at least six weeks in advance of the mode!"

Lady Méchante like Love laughed at locksmiths, but unlike Love she was by no means blind. Yet, for the first time in her life, she bungled. She entered and threaded her way through the house with dexterity, giving a quick glance here and there as to the importance or value of the mental furnishings of the place. Try as she might, however, there was little trace of any secret that could be made worth her time or trouble. The man's life was absurdly blameless, she estimated — there was hardly ten shillings' worth of blackmail from cellar to garret. It was, after all, a house for the rank and file of sneak-thieves, surely no place for a lady. Still, she dared not go till she had taken a look through the secretary in the library.

A few old love letters, yes; and she smiled at their uncompromising character. The man's life must, she thought, have been singularly dull. It would be a charity to write a note and leave it here for him, perhaps to smoulder like a spark till his glance kindled it into flame. She was feeling for a pen when a noise behind her turned her head. Mr. Edam had entered, and his face wore an unaccustomed look of surprise. It was evident that he was unused to entertaining ladies in his rooms; he was even ungallant enough to exhibit his displeasure.

"What, in heaven's name, does this mean, madam? And by what right are you ransacking my desk at this hour of the night?"

"Pray don't disturb yourself; I have just finished," said Lady Méchante, drawing on her gloves. "I was just picking up a few trifles, but I assure you that I have found nothing of value. I won't trouble you longer — really, I

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must be moving. But that old scarab seal there, yes, I might take that. Thank you, good-night!" She turned as she passed him: "Poor, dear man! You *are* bored, are n't you? Now, I know of a lady who is so good at that sort of thing. Really, she does it very well indeed!"

"Who and what are you?" Mr. Edam insisted. "Am I to take you for a common burglar? How did you enter my house?"

"*Pat-à-tie, pat-à-ta!*" mocked Florizelle. "In a moment I shall be annoyed, and then I shall never, *never* come again! I came in by the window — we modern English-women are agile. A burglar, yes — a *common* burglar, no! My word, sir, do I look it?" And she ran up to the mirror.

"You are young for this business, my dear," said Edam, who could not help but be charmed by the lady's manners. "But think what this means — at your age, too!" Lady Méchante blew him a kiss. "You a thief! God help me! I can hardly believe my eyes!"

"Oh, I beg you not to inflict your Nonconformist morality upon me at this hour!" she answered. "What, then, is your honesty — you, a city merchant? You buy, it is true, but you sell for more than you gave, cheating your victim out of one or two hundred per cent. What more do I? I take, here and there, what I can find, and I sell it again at an insignificant advance; think of the risks, too, should I fall in with those who are not *gentlemen!*" She gave him a searching glance, which embarrassed him visibly. "No, no, I believe you honorable, Mr. Edam; I do not accuse you. You believe in competition. You know that honesty is an outworn policy in your business. It has as little place in mine. I know,





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too, that you play the stock market; you are, in short, a gambler. Well, then, you prefer chance, and I, skill. Yet I had fancied you might understand — that you might appreciate the compliment I paid you. Never mind. You may yet regret your treatment of Lady Méchante. And now, sir, though I am far from angry, there is nothing I desire so much as a way to the door. I have a shattered ideal to nurse. It is very late. Yes, the tips of my fingers only. Well, perhaps we may yet be friends. Good-night!" She ran downstairs lightly and was into her brougham before Saul Edam could pursue.

Disastrous as was this sentimental experiment, she could not help confessing whimsically to Guy Bounder, who heard the tale with a lowering brow.

"Oh, I say!" he interrupted. "You'd better steer clear of Johnnies like that, you know! It was all right when you were in the swim, but business is business now, and I don't like it." The vital point of the episode had, as usual, utterly failed him, and Florizelle sighed.

Yet she was only twenty-three, youth was still bubbling in the glass of life, and she coaxed her illusion back to convalescence. From many pleasing hints and anecdotes the name of Sir Seton Maldivers, Q. C., became known to her as an advocate of unusual astuteness. In all her life she had not met a barrister. A few phrases of his lodged in her mind. He had a way with men and children. He was a woman-hater, to boot, and this alone was enough to pay for the trip to St. John's Wood. Up she went, then, and in she got by way of a parlor casement. She hoped he would be at home, for she was minded to steal a glimpse of his profile. There was an odor of good tobacco in the house as she tripped upstairs. She laid hand upon the

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door whence it proceeded most plainly, and walked in boldly. She was bound, this time, to put the matter to the touch without preliminary skirmish.

Sir Seton Maldivers was reading, but he rose hurriedly as she entered. I beg pardon," he exclaimed; "really, I had not heard you announced; you know, you quite surprised me!"

"It is close upon three in the morning," Florizelle returned, "and I had not thought it worth while to disturb the servants."

"But I don't quite understand —" began the baronet.

"I shall try to make it easier for you," said the lady. "Fancy, for the instant, that you are back in the days of Romance. Your book, yes, as I thought — Anthony Hope — that simplifies matters. Let us proceed, then, *en règle*. I come in the guise of a highwayman, by burglarious entry; I ask you to stand and deliver. Your ideas, then, or your life! I need not say I am desperate. Thank your stars that I am also beautiful. You are indeed fortunate, and this relief should be a pleasure. But I am in haste. What ideas, thoughts, fancies, quips, jests, conceits, inventions, judgments, theories, speculations, notions, opinions, beliefs, sentiments, or what-not you have, you must make over, for I must fill my head before morning breaks. I prefer a marketable commodity, surely, yet I shall not stick for commerce. Speak, then, if you dare answer a hot-headed woman! I am in no mood to wait while you consult the encyclopedia! Understand, my dear sir, if you please, you are being bullied. I am prepared to use force!"

"My dear Miss Rigmarole," cried the barrister, "I pray that you attempt to calm yourself. I will ring for attend-



A SENTIMENTAL FELON

ance; surely you are distraught! Just a minute, and my maid — ”

The little lady whipped out a revolver and presented it at his head. “Must I be more explicit?” she said. “Do you imagine that because I can gossip I shall not face death if necessary? I have not touched your property as yet, but pray do not found too high a conception of my scruples upon that restraint. I am of the criminal class, I assure you, and though I have neither a low, receding forehead nor the unsymmetrical *stigmata* of the mattoid, yet I am bad enough, in a way, as the world judges. Are you a man, then, or a mouse?”

“Are you a woman or a devil?” retorted the barrister.

Lady Méchante dropped the end of her weapon. “The retort courteous,” she mused. “He may do.”

In an instant she was disembarassed of the pistol and found herself violently seated upon a lounge. The *tête-à-tête* had become intense.

“By your eye, you are mad!” said Sir Seton, “and I shall take immediate steps for your apprehension.”

The lady forced a laugh. “Oh, no; never mind. My apprehension is satisfactory to me.” She opened her chate-laine and displayed several instruments, the use of which is unmistakably illegal. “Here! I may convince you, at least, of my sanity.”

“Heavens! How came you to this pitch of corruption?” said the other.

“Mere enthusiasm,” asserted the lady, lightly. “Much as you have attained your own eminence in the law. Yet I object to your substantive. Corruption is an unpleasant term; it is horridly suggestive of physical decay.”

“Yet you acknowledge that you have chosen a career of



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vice," the baronet said, still feeling her with his two eyes. "Have you no conscience, then, madam, that you prostitute your intellect in such an infamous pursuit?"

"Enough of such Philistinism. I am sick of such conventional-minded obloquy! You dare speak to me of conscience, of infamous pursuits—you who trade in professional hypocrisy? You, sir, are a criminal advocate; it is your business to defend or to prosecute, as your retainer bids; to shut your eyes to the verities and attempt to close others' vision. What are you but a licensed liar? It is the same to you whether you are keeping a criminal from his just deserts or stretching the neck of an innocent father whose little ones shall cast his blood upon your head! *Sac-à-papier!* My trade is open and holy beside yours. I pit my craft against organized society and take all chances. Even you know me by name and by fame. I am Lady Méchante, the heroine of ten thousand actionable works of art and genius!"

With that she turned and left him. At the door she stopped and turned to him, as an actress pauses at the wings before the customary stage exit. "I shall not come again," she said; "I shall not come again!" Her veil was tied, her gloves buttoned; she ducked her head and threw herself out of the doorway, leaving the baronet wiping his eyeglasses nervously.

"My word, you surprise me," said Guy Bounder, when he heard of the exploit. "But I sye, you know, you don't want to go and make gyme of a toff like Sir Seton, blimy, or I'm fair to split! What's the use of being so cocky? Why, Sir Seton is by wye of being the best criminal advocate in the city, and we're like to need him any time, s' help



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me! My word, it'll tyke a bit of doing to get *you* off, Florry, when *you*'re pulled!" Guy's fortunes had fallen to a low ebb, and his manners usually kept them company.

Such remonstrances, however, failed to dampen Mrs. Gaillarde's enthusiasm. Nor, indeed, did a series of unsuccessful attempts at nocturnal adventure during the ensuing season. She flitted here and there, breaking and entering, and now and again, as her moods grew more reckless, she hazarded interviews with her patrons. She confined her attentions to gentlemen whose birth and repute promised the greatest intellectual satisfaction, and she became a polite register of the town's bachelordom and *jeunesse dorée*. Many a youth awakened at two in the morning to find a beautiful woman, masked, and attired in tune with the latest cry, sitting in his favorite armchair, smoking a perfumed cigarette, waiting for him to compose his wits for the colloquy. She ranged wide with such as were fit opponents, touching religion, conduct, art, fashion, and sport, working delicately along the lines of least resistance.

How few there were, however, worth her while! From Mayfair to St. John's Wood, from St. James's to Chelsea and Bayswater, she followed every clue, and the legend of Lady Méchante arose and flew from club to club and from pub to pub. Last night she had visited young Barnegat, the Australian millionaire, at his rooms in Duke Street; last week she had fascinated Lord George Cobhouse, and he had chased her half-way across Kensington Gardens in his pajamas before her grooms had caught him and beaten him blue. To-night wagers had been laid on Blankinsop, the American plunger, and men walked the streets about Cavendish Square, hoping for a sight of the green ougham.





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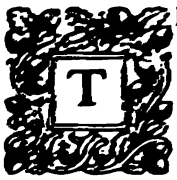
Gentlemen of fashion began to leave their house doors unlocked and their watches prominently displayed to net this butterfly. Her *mots* were retailed at afternoon functions; the women of the innermost circles conspired together to put a stop to the innovator. The man who had last received Lady Méchante was the popular hero until the next was chosen; and before long it came to pass that there were false witnesses enough for a dozen duels. No one, as yet, had seen her face; no one had touched her lips. With all her prominence in the arena of gossip, scandal had not wounded her; there were too many men-about-town infatuated with Lady Méchante to make that safe.

Chapter Three

THE CADGER OF CHELSEA

But their brains battered never wait the sporefall.

(Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.)

 HERE was a time when Guy Bounder had kept up a dummy residence in Jermyn Street and built from that *piéd-à-terre* a flimsy fabric of fashionable prestige. It was at Madame Qui-Vive's, indeed, that Mrs. Gaillarde first encountered him after her re-entrance into Society, but Mr. Bounder's presence there would hardly bear investigation. There are paid as well as paying guests at the functions of the *beau monde*. That had been Guy Bounder's unique appearance at the *Hôtel Qui-Vive*.

For a while the magnificent successes of Lady Méchante enabled her partner to keep up the Jermyn Street apartments upon a still more solid basis than before, and Guy found his professional connections with Society by day gave him many advantages which he was not slow to use by night. The partnership flourished for a while, but my Lady Méchante's fantastic taste for originality and the spicery of genius led her steadily away from the industries that Guy himself considered most remunerative. The weekly accountings grew smaller and smaller, and, not to put too fine a point to his sufferings, four months later found Guy Bounder installed permanently in rooms on the Queen's



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Road, Chelsea, opposite the Royal Hospital, a seedy, plucked thing of questionable antecedents and suspicious habits. He at his perihelion was no Adonis, but in this phase of disrespectability his weakness betrayed itself in face, speech, and gesture as he sat at his tiny window and thought of the recidivation of his associate.

At the rare intervals when he was permitted to see his patroness, he was, of course, unable to give voice to his reproaches. Florizelle was too gay and irresponsible for that; she had but to crook a little finger and he melted into a canine submission and sentimentality. She twittered and laughed away his disappointment, and yet he lacked the stamina to break with her directly — to plunge alone into manly enterprises of his own and reinstate himself in the profession and at the secret councils of the Fraternity. Lady Méchante had long since begun to neglect the conspiracies of Soho, and was in open revolt, playing her own part in the town as a free lance, and reporting to no central authority, claiming no vote in the tribunal. Guy feared for her. She was already suspected, but he had defended her as well as his standing permitted; he had no suspicion yet of any cardinal lapse from the primitive ethics of the clique. If such a mouse can love, he loved Florizelle, and love can accomplish marvels. His passion was in a fair way soon to make a man of him. A drop of jealousy in that sweet solution would at any moment turn it to a mordant acid.

He was sitting indolently at his window one day, watching the daily pavement quarrel whose actors were usually recruited from Paradise Alley across the street, when a green brougham came into the road from Tite Street and drew up at the curb. From this alighted something in veil and

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lace and fashionable frippery — woman or angel, he guessed. The crowd, staring, made way for her; she pushed open the iron gate of the tiny garden and rapped at the knocker with a gusto that rattled the windows. It was not two minutes before a flutter outside his door told him the honor was to be his, and, after a moment of suspense, Florizelle entered to him, borne up from below on a wave of curiosity visible and audible from his landlady, her father, daughter, and the slavey who whispered and peeped on the second landing. Mr. Bounder welcomed his caller with surprise, stuffed a wad of paper into the keyhole, and showed the lady a seat.

“Oh, Guy!” she commenced, casting a lively eye over the dingy chamber, “what a dear, funny little room!”

“It’s all o’ that,” said Guy, “at eight-and-six a week in advance, and sixpence a scuttle for coals. It’s beastly funny, ain’t it? Want to tyke a room here?”

“Poor old Guy,” the visitor murmured. “Are you strapped again, boy?”

“Strapped ain’t wot it is — I’m bust, Florry! I’ve winked me jerry, I’ve popped me topper, and I’ve hung up me waistcoats, and I’ve done in every last flash at Uncle Jacob’s. I ain’t got chalk fer a ’arf-pint o’ bitter at the Six Bells. I’m a vag, I am.”

“My word!” cried the little lady, drawing out her handkerchief, a lace bit, a two-guinea affair from New Bond street, and wiping a tear from her lid. “Are n’t you doing any jobs now?”

“I ain’t got the nerve without you, Florry, blimy if I have! I ain’t bust a ’ouse since you give me the sneak. Strike me blue if I won’t be carryin’ the flag in another week! I’ve got down to w’istlin’ up ’ansoms fer the toffs and cab-duckin’, I’ve. An’ you flashin’ abart in brooms,



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s' help me! Christmas! I feel as mean as a dyin' duck in a thunderstorm, Florry. But I ain't tried to touch you, old girl, 'ave I? Not fer a half-crown, I ain't. I'll do time first!"

"Poor old Guy! Think of the good jobs we've been in together! How I *have* neglected you! But that's all right, Guy; I've been busy myself."

"Busy at wot, I'd like to arsk? I've heerd o' Lady Meshant's doin's abart town, Florry, an' I ain't winked. I kin trust you fer a pal, old girl, cos I know yer stryite, but wot's the little gyime? Ain't it time to let me in?"

"Never mind my affairs in the past, but I've a 'pony' for you now, for the luck's turned. Yes, a 'monkey,' if you like, and you fit. See here: how much are you in for with your landlady?"

Bounder took out a roll of greasy sheets from an empty tobacco jar. "I don't do much eatin'," he mumbled. "I get sevenpence-ha'penny breakfasts, w'ich means tea like paynt, an' a 'orrid egg with two slabs o' toast to it, and mangy butter. There's fourteen bob four a week fer six weeks, is two pun six, an' I ain't give the slavey a tanner sinct I come. Oh, I'm a 'igh Willy, I am!"

"Here, take this for the present," said Lady Méchante, handing over a pair of ten-pound notes. "There's more to come when you've got your clothes out of pawn. I hope you have n't forgotten how to speak English, though, Guy; you're no use to me on the 'other side of the water.' I don't do much business in Battersea or the New Cut nowadays."

"My dear Mrs. Gaillarde," protested Mr. Bounder, with emphasis, "you will find that when you leave cards like this with me, Guy Forsythe Bounder, Esquire, is always at

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home. I can learn more English from a Bank of England note in four minutes than from all the pawn tickets on the Old King's Road, I assure you. I am by way of being a creature of environment. Contact with the purlieus of Paradise Alley gilds one, in a way, with a manner. I take on color. From this moment I am all West End. When I wear varnished boots I promise you that everything else shall correspond. I shall tub daily while this munificence lasts, and I forswear Shag for Egyptian Deities forthwith."

"Here, take one," cried Lady Méchante, merrily, producing an enameled cigarette case. "I confess your room reeks. Now you are rehabilitated, you surely must notice it. Matches?" she added, and she shook the box as she passed it. "And now to business, for I see my carriage is creating an excitement in the neighborhood, and there are goings and comings on the stair. You can still do my bidding without unnecessary curiosity as to my motives?"

"Madam, I am your champion again," Mr. Bounder protested. "In our profession the days of chivalry have never died."

"Let us call it nights of chivalry, to be more precise. I have need of you."

"Otherwise you would not be here," said Bounder, sadly.

"No, no; not that exactly," she replied. "But that is beside the mark. You have mentioned my green brougham. I am sincerely sorry to find it has become so conspicuous. Yet I may as well use the advertisement. I propose to ply it, then, henceforth as a decoy; that is, if you will be my duck." She leaned toward him semi-affectionately.

Such demonstrations always made Mr. Bounder nervous. Like most men, he preferred to make his own advances,



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and grew embarrassed when forced to play up to such trumps. There was, indeed, more difficulty in Lady Méchante's leniency than in her reserve, so her demeanor sobered him. He rose awkwardly.

"What do you mean?" he stammered.

Florizelle laughed wickedly, knowing her hold over him was so sure. "This, if I must put it into words of one syllable," she said. "I propose to ransack the town while you play ducks and drakes with these silly men. You take my brougham and my mask and entertain my friends. I assure you I have a wide acquaintance, and your entries will be easy. Meanwhile, I have my part to act, which need not concern you."

"What shall I say?" cried Mr. Bounder, pitifully. "I've heard the talk on the Row, and I know you've been up to some game with the Johnnies; but, my word! I don't see myself sitting in men's chambers in an evening gown, prattling Ascot and Goodwood at three in the morning! I'm out for the oof, Florry. Business is business. I don't complain, mind you. I know you're straight, as I said, and I don't pretend to fathom your tricks. If I did n't trust you, you know I have only to put them onto you at Soho Square."

"*Sac-à-papier!*" cried Mrs. Gaillarde. "Do I understand you to threaten me? Do you know I am Lady Méchante? I could undo the Burglars' Central Committee in ten minutes. Man, I am in with the Privy Council, to the last Lord! I need n't mention the Prince—you may have heard."

"That's all gammon, Florry; but I said I was sure of you. Still, business is business, too," he repeated.

"Well, you won't complain. See here: this chatelaine

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I found on the dressing-table of — well, never mind whom. It was laid there for me. It's a Queen Anne, too. Charlie Northbrooke — you know Charlie? Dear boy! It's a pity he has n't brains! Why, he leaves ten-pound notes about, with poems on the back. No trick, either, for they cash all right. Why, you stupid, you have only to take a Gladstone bag and pick the swag everywhere you go. You'll find they're fond of me. I've been offered twenty guineas to drop my mask. The town's *wild* over me! You can make a thousand a week!"

"Why do you leave it, then?" asked the astounded Bounder.

"Never mind! I've a better graft than that. Will you do it or not, that's the question?"

"I will, if it's like that," said Guy. "When do I commence?"

"To-night. Come to No. 45 Fitzroy Street, and jump into the carriage as it goes past at one o'clock. You'll find all the information in the right-hand pocket by the clock, and mind, be sharp. Do as much as you can. There are several expecting me; and don't drop the mask, not for anything they offer. Here — you'll find a sergeant of police at the corner of Brook street and Grosvenor Square. I owe him five pounds. He's a dear! Your costume? Oh, yes; I'll leave all the necessary things in the carriage, and you can change while you're riding."

"Fancy!" interjected Bounder. "I don't mind a bit of acting, for I'm by way of being a proper 'serio,' but, Lord! I can't train down to *your* figure!" And he looked at her with complimentary glances.

"You'll have to lace; it must be done, my dear fellow, and the cape will help. But study your part well, mind.



THE CADGER OF CHELSEA

There's Sir Cyril Heatherby — talk polo to him, and say you've seen him in the Park with Dolly Chatterton. He'll protest. Then Lord Suddenleigh; he's engaged to the Honorable Maude Evelyn Poke, and you can twit him with that. Leave him the note you'll find in the left-hand pocket of the brougham, and borrow all you can. Look out sharp for Colonel Wetmore; he'll jolly well chase you downstairs if you don't have your revolver ready. The Marquis of Newbury will probably offer you jewelry, but insist on cash."

"Do they know you're coming?"

"Lord, no; that is, not just when. I've no doubt they've all paid the bobbies to look the other way. No, I never make engagements; it's too risky. I just drop in casually."

"Well, you *have* got a calling list, Florry; my word! I'll do what I can, but I'd like to know what you're up to!"

"You'll be busy enough without wondering about that! Well, I must be off. So long, old boy, do it well!" She opened the door, blew him a kiss, and tripped downstairs. The front door slammed, the carriage door snapped, and the green brougham was off toward the West End.

Quickly as she vanished, however, the landlady was upstairs for her rent before the horses felt the whip. Bounder had already begun to shave, and was practicing the airs and graces of a gentleman.

"H'm, h'm," murmured Lady Méchante to herself, as the houses flew by, "I *thought* he was in a way to make me trouble. I think I looked him up just in time. He'll talk about me at the Committee Rooms in Soho, will he? Well, I've got rid of that. He'll be too busy to watch me

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for a while, I give my word. I'll settle him, just as sure as my name is Lady Méchante, and that's no joke, either. And *now*, and *now*, for Mortimer Stencil. Ye gods, a whole winter gone and no one yet worth while! London is the dullest place on earth. If he is as much a 'card' as the others, heaven help me, for the devil won't! Yet what an actor he is! He ought to be *the* one at last! Heigho, I'm bored to death. Tim's my last chance; if he fails me, I'll join the Salvation Army and be a lieutenant of the Kennington Devil Drivers!"

Chapter Four

THE PLATONIST

You're passionately met in this sad world!

(The White Devil.)



MORTIMER STENCIL was an American, which fact may or may not have been the foundation of Lady Méchante's hopes. He was good looking, even for a matinée idol, having the sort of face that men admire without contempt, and not of that conventional, shaved cast which proclaims the profession. Travel had tuned him; he did not jar or discord in any society. He had wit, the dry humor of his nationality, and not a little of the romantic conservatism of the American in London. He lived, during his London seasons, in a little street off Westbourne Grove, called Something Crescent, a street on a curve, boasting front gardens elevated above the pavement.

It was a "typical London evening," as tourists would call it, when Florizelle drove past the warehouses of Whiteley, the "Universal Provider," wondering whether, even in that famous magazine, she could find her quest — an interesting man. The fog had obliterated perspective as a coat of whitewash destroys the scrawls and shadows of a cellar wall. The horse padded on, doubtfully, coming to rude stops occasionally as the driver attempted to force him up over a curb or into a hydrant, and Lady Méchante was buffeted to and fro inconsiderately. She had changed her



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brougham for a private hansom and her evening gown for a white shirt and swallowtail. An Inverness cape was over all. Upon her coiled hair sat a mohair opera hat, securely pinned. Between her lips was a white cigarette, burning reluctantly, for the lady was a bit nervous.

Yet there was a smile on the face of this beautiful Nonpareille, and her mind was alert and ware. When she reached the house of her new client, she sprang from the seat, and the cab passed on without stopping. She ran up the wooden steps, passed quickly round the house, and paused at a window in the rear. In a moment her mask was adjusted and she had begun to force the sash. That done, she slid over the sill, navigated the floor without disaster, and passed into the hall.

Above, it seemed to her that she heard the sound of voices, so she dropped to a seat on the stair to listen and wait till the house grew quiet. Someone was speaking in a mellow, modulated tone; it was not the tune of any English inflection, for the sentences ended with a falling accent. No Briton, she knew, could finish a sentence without the customary "is n't it?" with the characteristic circumflex. No Briton, either, could make a statement without interlardng the phrases with "what I mean to say is *this*." And yet there was not the nasal drawl she had been wont to call American. It was evidently the voice of a gentleman. After a while the monologue ceased, and waiting a half-hour, she stole up to the upper landing.

In the upper hall a thin pencil of light shot from a single keyhole, and she bowed her head to peep in, with a muttered apology. Within the chamber a gentleman was standing with his back to her, in front of a mirror. He was swathed in a dressing-gown or bath-robe of Japanese





THE PLATONIST

flowered crêpe and was brushing his hair vigorously with two brushes without handles. Below, a cuckoo clock set up a distressing double hiccough.

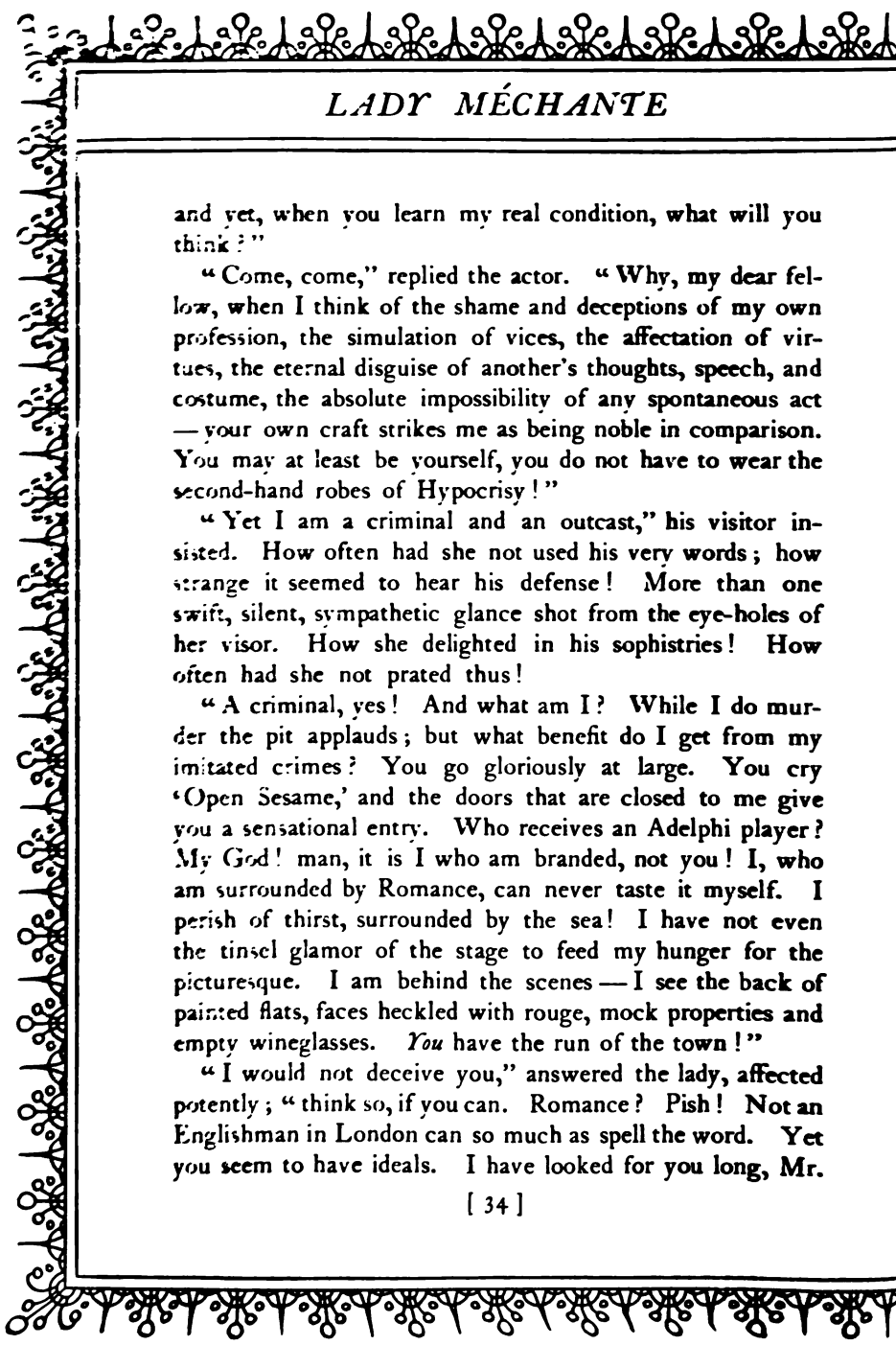
Lady Méchante turned the handle, but the door was locked; then she cried "Mortimer!" through the key-hole, and waited. The occupant of the room answered directly, and threw open the door. His aplomb certified to his gentility, for he bowed politely, and then threw up his hands in the American fashion, in token of submission to the "hold-up."

"My watch and what money I have you will find on the bureau," he said. (Florizelle wondered what "bureau" meant.) "I beg you to make no more noise than is conveniently necessary. These incidents, I suppose, will happen, even in London, and, so long as you do not shoot at my toes, to force me to dance, I can only admire your enterprise." He waved her toward the mirror, and then, seeing no weapon in her hand, let his arms drop and waited for his cue.

Mrs. Gaillarde, accustomed as she was to cordial receptions in her wanderings, could not but wonder at the man's courtesy. She reflected, too, that she was in masculine attire, and the astonishment grew to a marvel. She dropped into a chair, therefore, smiling behind her mask. "You take me, then, for a burglar?" she murmured.

"I had sincerely hoped so!" Mr. Stencill explained. "To my mind, it is the most picturesque of professions. I have long desired to become acquainted with the fraternity. I beg you," he added, "do not disappoint me. Your informal entrance has, you will admit, given me grounds for my suspicion."

"It is a nasty trade," cried the newcomer. "I loathe it;



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and yet, when you learn my real condition, what will you think?"

"Come, come," replied the actor. "Why, my dear fellow, when I think of the shame and deceptions of my own profession, the simulation of vices, the affectation of virtues, the eternal disguise of another's thoughts, speech, and costume, the absolute impossibility of any spontaneous act — your own craft strikes me as being noble in comparison. You may at least be yourself, you do not have to wear the second-hand robes of Hypocrisy!"

"Yet I am a criminal and an outcast," his visitor insisted. How often had she not used his very words; how strange it seemed to hear his defense! More than one swift, silent, sympathetic glance shot from the eye-holes of her visor. How she delighted in his sophistries! How often had she not prated thus!

"A criminal, yes! And what am I? While I do murder the pit applauds; but what benefit do I get from my imitated crimes? You go gloriously at large. You cry 'Open Sesame,' and the doors that are closed to me give you a sensational entry. Who receives an Adelphi player? My God! man, it is I who am branded, not you! I, who am surrounded by Romance, can never taste it myself. I perish of thirst, surrounded by the sea! I have not even the tinsel glamor of the stage to feed my hunger for the picturesque. I am behind the scenes — I see the back of painted flats, faces heckled with rouge, mock properties and empty wineglasses. *You* have the run of the town!"

"I would not deceive you," answered the lady, affected potently; "think so, if you can. Romance? Pish! Not an Englishman in London can so much as spell the word. Yet you seem to have ideals. I have looked for you long, Mr.

THE PLATONIST

Stencill! You are one of three millions. I speak timidly at such a visitation; you may think I am but a timid burglar, even at three-and-twenty, but — I should like to *know* you.”

“Is this possible?” cried Mr. Stencill. “You do me too much honor, sir!”

“I have not yet confessed,” Mrs. Gaillarde answered. “I have still to test you. You Americans are so absurdly chivalrous that you must compensate somehow in your attitude toward women. Yes, I am a woman! Hate me now, despise me, and my long quest is over, and I shall return to respectability!” So saying, in a fervor of suspense she threw off her mask and fell to weeping.

Stencill's whole appearance changed. “Heavens!” he cried, as he saw her young, fresh face, lighted by imagination and sentiment, very beautiful. Then, “Hush!” and he sprang to the door and closed it. “My wife!” he cried, in a low, piercing voice.

The words stabbed her, but it was not so much that name as the tone in which it was uttered that sent a shaft of despair into her heart. He was an American, and therefore of the Middle Ages of sentiment. He was in love with his wife. The accent of his emotion proved it. She looked up at him a little haggardly. She must rob him, and that quickly, or her reputation would be gone with him. She drew out her pistol with a forced braggadocio and pointed it tremblingly at his head. She saw on the moment that at this demonstration his conscience was relieved.

“I shall not disturb Mrs. Stencill, and, now that I know who is in the house, I need trouble you no longer with my fictions. Forgive me my ruse!” She stepped to the chiffonier and shoveled the trinkets listlessly into a pocket of her Inverness. His interest in her had been extinguished

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the moment he discovered her sex. Married, and still in love! It was ridiculous, effeminate, anachronistic, yet the pose fascinated her. She must have time to think it over.

Stencill's keen interest in the waywardness of her business exhibited an obvious struggle with his fear of her discovery. His voice sank into a hushed double *piano* as he said, "You interest me, madam, beyond words. Had you been the man you seemed, I would have liked nothing better than to know you; we could be much to each other. And, too, I am very curious; I have ideas of my own that might—I speak in all modesty—assist you. But I confess I am in an uncomfortable position. You understand—"

"Perfectly," said Lady Méchante, freezingly.

"Still," he continued, weakening under her scorn, "under other circumstances—you might call upon my wife, perhaps."

"*Sir!*" she cried, with a fine histrionic scorn.

"Ah, well, of course!" he assented. "I remember one of Methuselah's earliest maxims: 'Never introduce female contemporaries.' But may I not ask your name?"

For the first time in her illicit career Florizelle hesitated. She even blushed. "I am she who has been known as Lady Méchante," she murmured, casting down her eyes.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the other, almost aloud. Not quite. The burden of a presence in a proximate apartment still cowed him. He sat down on his bed and put his head in his hands.

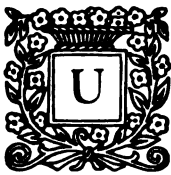
The gesture was opportune. When he looked up again his visitor had vanished. He threw open the door and began to whistle loudly, but out of tune, an insistently apologetic melody.

Chapter Five

BUSINESS IS BUSINESS

*They'll pull you all to pieces for your wim-wams,
Your garters and your gloves: go modestly!*

(The Night Walker.)



USED as she was to calling Guy Bounder a "cake," Mrs. Gaillarde could not deny his gifts, and she had not picked him for a stool-pigeon without a good opinion of his powers of mimicry. He was not half bad as an actor, his form was plastic, his voice capable of much distortion, and he could even imitate the floating diminuendo of Lady Méchante's quicksilver laughter. He had her mannerisms by heart, as when she sat down with a gyratory curl of her skirt; he had caught the *pat-à-tie, pat-à-ta* tattoo of her fingers, the tilt of her chin, and her wavelike step.

So it was that his first attempts at impersonation succeeded miraculously, and his studies to maintain her distinguished prestige did her no little credit. Her stock went up all over town, as she was found to be more than ever amenable to complimentary benefices. Lord Suddenleigh's generosity induced Guy to visit at Belgrave Square more often, perhaps, than Florizelle would have approved had Florizelle known, but Guy gathered other valuables besides "tenners" and "twenties," and she acquired an amount of scandal that might sometime be of use with the Honorable



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Maude Evelyn. Bounder found an easy method of erasing Charley Northbrooke's poems from the back of his bank-notes, and he had less fear of the Marquis of Newbury's jewels than did his principal. Of Colonel Wetmore, more later. He was by far the most intractable, but as he was disgustingly wealthy, poor Guy could not keep away, as shall be seen in the sequel.

He went and came, then, for a time in blissful content, too busily employed to notice Lady Méchante's delinquency. No offers would induce his favor even to the extent of a kiss. It goes without saying that he did not allow the mask to be dropped for an instant.

All this while he trusted Florizelle as a dog trusts his master, but, once on the path of wonder, there was but a single destination. Lady Méchante, in her proper person, was heard of no more, and he began to suspect her disappearance. The spark traveled slowly, but at last it came upon some inflammable fibres of sensibility, when suspicion flamed up, burning with a fire colored by presentiment. Had Florry gone wrong? Enough manhood was melted down into a lump of resolve to give his fears solidity, and he set himself to hunt the lady down and prove her.

It was not long before he found his opportunity. He dropped in at the Adelphi one night, and there, with her eyes glued to the stage, with her lace handkerchief ready for an explosion of emotion, sat Florizelle. Behind the footlights the actors ranted and sawed the air, and for some time Guy could not distinguish the particular attraction to his lively and affected patron. As the scene changed, my Lady Méchante grew *distracte*, but the entrance of Mr. Mortimer Stencill, spouting a bombastic soliloquy, drew her from her reverie, and her opera glasses



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flew up. This was enough for Bounder, and he did not notice the interested occupant of the opposite box, a lady of sprightly figure, dressed in the outrageous good taste that becomes the American woman. She seemed a good-natured observer of the ingenuous occupation of her *vis-à-vis*, and laughed merrily in a manner that to the pit seemed inconsequent.

A word at the box-office gave Guy Bounder information of the star's abode, and two hours later, after a game of draughts at the Café Royal, he hailed a cab and set off for Something Crescent, Westbourne Grove. The equipage was dismissed at the Royal Oak, and Guy set out on foot into the fastnesses of Bayswater. The house was found without difficulty, and he smiled to see a front upper-story room alight.

He was a "second-story" man of old, and the veranda columns were no trick. From the top of the portico he had a clear view into the room through a slit between the curtains, and, by a rare chance, the window was slightly open. There, in very fact, was Stencill, ensconced in an easy-chair, smoking a perfecto, conversing with someone in evening dress, someone whose back was turned. This person still wore a hat, and was not smoking, nor was the glass propinquous upon the table filled. These things were disagreeably suspicious.

"My dear fellow," Stencill was saying, "if you insist upon my calling you that, I can't put you out, you know, but I assure you I am trepid. You have seen enough of me to know I am unique. I am a man who can love but once. A platonic affection? If you like, and if you still believe in such follies, well enough. You are still young and enthusiastic. I have paid for that farce in my day,



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and if you are willing to take the consequences, I can't help saying that I like you!"

"And you the only interesting man in London!" said the other, while Guy gasped at the *timbre* of the voice which uttered this familiar sentiment. "What hope is left for me? For the first time in my life I have made a fool of myself. To think of Lady Méchante, *Lady Méchante*, forcing her attentions on a man!" She turned her profile; it was indeed she, and Guy felt the portico sway under him.

"Florry, Florry here, for pleasure!" he muttered. "Calling on this play-actor, *free?* My Gawd!"

"I have had a strange life," she went on, "cursed by the continuous desire for human interest. Men may make their own friends, aye, and keep them with no fear. We women are bound to take what the gods send us. The good old days are gone by, when 'the males compete and the females select.' I have vibrated between the limits of Society and Crime. I have ranged high and low; I tried even marriage! I have found you too late. What is left? More dinners at Madame Qui-Vive's? I was no more born for those ceremonials than for the conspiracies of Soho Square. I have had my fling, and I have lost. *Mon Dieu!* How I have fallen, to pursue you like this!"

"There are others; I am by no means the only man with an imagination in the world," Stencil protested, mildly. "The way is open for you to explore; there, too, lies America."

"I am fastidious," she responded. "I want all or nothing—that is, all my own way. Tell me, do you believe in Affinities?" she asked.

"Affinities!" and Mortimer Stencil hid his smile.



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“Why, my dear, I am thirty-three! Go seek a chameleon. You may find Affinities to throw at the birds! My dear child, heaven forgive me, but I believe you *are* an American!”

Guy Bounder heard no more. His soul was sick with this sentimentality. Hardly had he left the house, however, before Mrs. Stencill opened the door where the two were conversing, and entered with a smile. Mortimer started guiltily. As for Lady Méchante, she had foregone the possibility of embarrassment long ago.

“Tim,” said the hostess of this somewhat dizzy group, “pray present me!”

She did not wait, however, but went gaily up to Florizelle with a great show of frankness. Lady Méchante rose and met her. The two kissed theatrically. Mortimer Stencill looked on puzzled. Then his face brightened.

“Well,” said Florizelle, “it’s up to you, Mrs. Stencill!” She had not been calling upon the American twice a week without imbibing a few new metaphors.

“Why,” began Roberta Stencill, “you see, my dear, it’s no sort of use. I knew it would n’t be, in the beginning, but I did so want dear old Tim to have a good time. He’s so romantic that it seemed a shame to have him all to myself, and yet he’s utterly incapable of an actual affair. His sentiment is all theoretical. You are a creature of action — I can see that, my dear — and I knew you’d never believe it if I told you how partial Tim was. He’s done you good, and you’ve done him good. So now I don’t see why we can’t all three have a good time together. Bless you, you need n’t call! You may burgle us to your heart’s content; the more scandal the better in our business. But the immediate fact is that there’s been a man outside your win-



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dow, listening. I thought you'd like to know. It seemed to me that he fainted away and fell off the roof of the portico. Anyway, he's gone, and he left this behind." She pointed to a small but exquisitely tooled silver lantern. It bore a monogram — "G. B."

"Guy Bounder!" cried Lady Méchante. "He was here, and he listened?"

"With interest," said Roberta Stencill. "As much as mine," she added, naively.

"It *was* a psychological moment!" said Mortimer.

"My dear," said Lady Méchante, "it was climacteric."

Chapter Six

A SCANDAL IN SUSSEX SQUARE

O, thou abominable, loathsome gargarism!

(The White Devil.)



THREE days after this the "All Smoke and No Fire" company finished its engagement at the Adelphi, and the actors and actresses of the troupe had their farewell dinner at Kettner's. Mr. Stencill, true to the Quixotic chivalry of his continent, had dined there with his wife. He was a monomaniac on the subject of connubial faith. Mrs. Stencill shared his views, moreover, and the two kept up the national pose with childlike confidence.

They returned from this banquet, on foot, at two in the morning, fascinated by the secret charms of the deserted city, now vacant as a beach at low tide. Now and again the jingling note of a passing hansom sang from a distant square like the cry of a belated October mosquito. Hardly a light was visible save the row of lamps that divides the traffic and guides the eastward vehicles down into the constellation of islands at the Piccadilly archipelago. The Circus was a polar sea of white electric light as they crossed, and above, the stars sprang for a few hours from their daily eclipse as the curtain of smoke and vapor thinned. Piccadilly was theirs alone, as far as the eye could reach. The very houses seemed to sleep.

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They took the path across Hyde Park, along the Serpentine, and out the Victoria Gate, talking ever of Lady Méchante; of the absurd incongruity of a lady with a temperament in this supercivilized town; of her tantalizing efforts to find a man of her mettle. She was a sport, a hybrid, exotic to the anemic, hypercultivated hothouse. Peril was in store for her.

They crossed toward Sussex Square, and there, as a carriage flashed past, gently trotting round the ring, Roberta pressed the arm of her husband.

"See, the green brougham!" she cried. "I saw it from the Park; it has been round three times since I first looked. It must be waiting for Lady Méchante. Let's wait and see her."

As she spoke the carriage came again into view, traveling like a star about its orbit, hugging the curb by the iron palings. The two walked slowly, circling in an opposite direction round the Square.

They had hardly completed the circuit, however, when the front door of a house in Stanhope Street directly opposite was suddenly flung open with violence, displaying a square of brilliant light in the façade of the residence. Silhouetted against this background was a confused mass — human beings intermingled in a preposterous skirmish, from which arms were flung and legs gesticulated. The *mêlée* was over in a moment, the door was slammed with a jar, locking the house in darkness, while a frenzied figure flung down the steps.

Whether man or woman could not be determined at first, though the grotesque form bore a skirt and the remnants of a hat waved from a wig atop the disheveled head. It tottered into the light of a lamp-post, staggered, and then

A SCANDAL IN SUSSEX SQUARE

made at a sharp run for the brougham swinging into sight. The upper half of the creature proclaimed manhood, yet the gown hung at his belt and the hat was cast loose upon the pavement. He was almost bare from the waist up, and round his bleeding breast circled the remnants of a pair of stays and a few fripperies of lace and ribbon. He ran like a madman, an unholy spectacle, through the stillness of the night, swearing horribly in strange coster's oaths. He sprang upon the brougham and wrenched at the door.

Then from the window a pretty head appeared, and a ripple of quicksilver laughter rang out. Lady Méchante had come again by her own. It was a ridiculous colloquy. The lady tittered to die at his plight, but kept the door of the carriage locked, while the driver fingered his whip apprehensively.

"Oh, you guy, Guy!" she screamed. "I told you to look sharp for the mask, and be careful of Colonel Wetmore. You'll eavesdrop on me, on Lady Méchante, will you? You'll report my case in Soho, my dear fellow, will you? Why couldn't you attend to your own affairs, Bounder? I'm shocked. You're a sight for the gods — not for a lady — my friend. Get to the Park, you inebriated tatterdemalion!" She rang the electric bell for the driver.

Bounder broke out into oaths, fuming furious. He put his fist through the carriage window, and the broken glass tinkled merrily against the cobbles. He dodged back then, but not quick enough to escape the lash of the coachman's whip, which landed on his bare back, curling him up in agony. They were off at a hand gallop forthwith, brougham, driver, and the fair passenger inside whirling past Mr. and Mrs. Stencill, gaping on the pavement. Guy stood, an in-



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human scarecrow, in all his outrageous circumstance, fair in the middle of the street, and continued his profanity, gesturing the moon. He had dropped his h's with his waist and corsage, and his talk was the talk of a bargee the next morning of a mad Bank Holiday.

Mortimer Stencill drew his wife away, though there was not a word audible that a lady should understand, and left the victim to his apostrophe. But at the next turning the indecent nightmare shot by them, sprinting like a demon, a marvel of preposterous *deshabille*, an outrage to sound and sight, dripping *lingerie* and buttons, as he galloped to the top of the street and collided with a policeman at the turning. As the couple went out of sight, officer and maniac were locked in each other's arms, and a shrill whistle was being echoed from several directions at once.

The actor and his spouse were by this time too weak to talk, and they went home, borne by gasps and concussions of inane hysteria. It was too late to sleep, for they were to take the 2.15 train at Victoria for Southampton, and for several hours the husband and wife sat in excited conversation on the freaks and madcap perfervor of my Lady Méchante. That her rope was short they could not but believe. The capture of Bounder would inevitably compromise her, and the hue-and-cry would surely set the fashionable districts of London by the ears. She was doubtless betrayed at Soho Square long before this, and Fate must soon overtake her who had mocked high and low.

"Tim," Mrs. Stencill said, finally, "we must rescue her. It would be a shame to let such a spirit languish here, even were she to escape from the clutches of the law. What an

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American she would make! What a wife for some nice man!"

"What a wife, indeed!" mused Mortimer. "A man with nerve and sentiment might tame her, if he lived."

"Nonsense! You won't understand. What is her vivacity but the reaction from the canons of this effete community? In the West her eccentricity would never be noticed. And give her the sight of real men and women living sane and untrammelled lives, I am sure she would be a new woman. She has balked and kicked over the traces because she felt the restraint, but once show her liberty and she will be tractable enough. She's a thousand times too good for London."

"She's too good to be true, I'm afraid. Have you any amiable snake-charmer or lion-tamer in mind, my dear little match-maker?" he added.

"Tim, don't jolly me, for I'm in earnest," she protested. "As to my plans, you shall see. The first and immediate thing is to find her and get her away." She rose and put on her hat.

Mortimer Stencill followed her, as was his wont, being an ideal American husband. There was no denying her in this mood. It was now nearly five o'clock. They happened on a cab at their very door, and drove at a well-tipped pace in the direction of Bloomsbury.

"Are you going to break in?" he asked, as they passed out of Holborn.

Mrs. Stencill made a mouth. "If necessary," she said.

But it was not necessary. The front door of No. 31 Fitzroy Street was seen, as they drew up, to stand ajar.

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“ We must hurry,” cried the wife. “ I am afraid we are too late.”

They ran up the steps and in unhindered. But as they reached the second landing a jaded, hispid French maid confronted them.


“ Eet ees ze poleece ? ” she asked. “ I am ready ; but here zere ees nozzing ! ”


There was, indeed, nothing in Lady Méchante’s boudoir but the wreck of a luxuriant apartment, still odorous with violets. Every stick of furniture had been removed—hurriedly, it might seem, by the evidence of the scratches and rags of tapestry on the walls. In my lady’s chamber a few gowns still remained ; the maid had evidently been interrupted in her work.

Mrs. Stencill then explained that she was a friend of the vanished mistress, and anxious to help her away.

“ Ah, zat ees diffairente,” said Suzette. “ But *vraiment*, I not know ! My lady left one hour ago, een a hurry, yes ! She deed not say to where I should send ze things, but I veesh not ze poleece to get everyzing. So I have removed them. Perhaps I shall hear, perhaps not. *Que voulez-vous que je fasse ?* ”

There was no time to wait. The gay bird had flown, and Mr. and Mrs. Stencill returned sadly to their house in Something Crescent, in bare time to get their own impedimenta ready for the train. They made the trip down to Southampton quietly, in a first-class compartment. The only other occupant was a little old lady with gray hair and a deep mourning veil. It seemed she, too, was bound for the American steamer, for she was still with them when the tender put off. But they did not see her again for several days, owing to Mrs. Stencill’s *mal de mer*.





A SCANDAL IN SUSSEX SQUARE

. It was when Roberta crawled down to the dining-room for dinner on the fourth day out, trembling but victorious, that she found, seated opposite her at the table, pink of cheek, curly of hair, bright of eye, and with an inimitable expression of some devil turned saint — who but my Lady Méchante !





Book Two

THE WALKING PEANUT

Here is a gentleman, my scholar, whom (for some private reasons me specially moving) I am covetous to gratify with title of master in the noble and subtile science of courtship.

(Cynthia's Revels.)

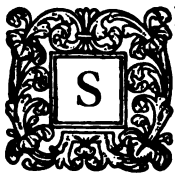


Chapter One

THE PEANUT SHELL

*Then were my thoughts so frail and unconfirmed,
And I was chained to follies of the world.*

(The Jew of Malta.)



IF T the city of San Francisco block by block, and you would have found no queerer, quaint, crooked, or a house, nor a house in worse array, of more tatterdemalion aspect and cock-sided disrepute than the chunk of queer cottage at No. 1031 Vallejo Street. Knock-kneed and out of elbows as it was, it clung to the very pinnacle of Russian Hill with a pitch of conceit ridiculous to behold, the scandal of its upright, straight-sided neighbors, crazy and rough as a peanut shell on an elephant's back. It stood, leaning uneasily on rotting foundations, little as a trunk, battered, spattered and tattered with dust, fog, and the vandal *gaminerie* of the vicinity. The place cornered on a little *cul-de-sac* known to the hardy climbers of the Hill as Florence Street, and its windows, when not blinded by the missiles of the neighboring hoodlums, looked impertinently across the Golden Gate to Mount Tamalpais, sweeping the slopes of the Presidio, the Bay of San Francisco, the Oakland foothills, and the Contra Costa shore, three-quarters of a circle of panorama fit for the outlook from an imperial porphyry palace.



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This pert box once contained, for a matter of some ten hours a day, the very appropriate person of our hero.

Reader, Mr. Roulhac Braghampton! Manufacturer of the best hand-made folly the city of San Francisco afforded at that time, a purveyor of assorted deviltries, with a reputation amongst the mischief-makers of his club and caste attained only after years of persistent frivolity. As high-tighty a gambolier as ever was, was Roulhac; a wag, a madcap, and, in his own way, a bit of a fop to boot; in short, an accomplished devil-may-care, thoroughly abandoned to his harlequin peccadillos.

Cooped in his ramshackle cage during the first quarter of every day, this precious Braghampton fighting-cocklet was known to the inhabitants of the summit of Russian Hill as a queer bird who flitted from window to window during the forenoon, in scant attire, or sat gazing seaward at his table, writing, writing, writing. He was wont to appear later upon the deck of his rear porch, lathered and toweled, addressing a scrap of broken mirror, and, towards noon, he was likely to emerge in long, yellow mackintosh, or, mayhap, if the sun shone, in more befitting raiment, to descend into the gayety of the lower town. The prowling Arab of the Hill dubbed him, thereat, "Walking Peanut," for obscure reasons, and with this epithet he was always hailed in scurrilous sing-song as he made down the twenty-three slimy, slippery, sloping, heartrending wooden steps to the greasy incline which, at the lower end of this Vallejo Street block, did service for a sidewalk.

It was an October morning, well along towards ten o'clock, when Roulhac arose and, as usual, pulled on a mangy red flannel bath-robe and peered down the steep little two-foot stair in his hallway to see what Fate had sent



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him by way of the post. On the floor, to his astonishment, was a litter of pale blue envelopes, extending from the door of his small front parlor down the narrow passage to the entrance to the middle room. His half-awakened eyes blinked at the miracle, for this morning's mail was suspiciously prolific even for his customary profusion, and he shuffled down in his Chinese slippers and waded luxuriously through the flood of missives. The welter of letters carpeted the bare hall with blue; all the envelopes appeared to be directed in the same hand, and were alike in shape and color; they were obviously the work of one Titanic correspondent; the script, it is needless to say, was boldly feminine.

He scuffed them together in a noble armful, ascended and laid them on his sitting-room table, disposing them as one spreads a game of solitaire, in rows of sevens; there were, in all, fifty communications — a very debauch. In the intervals of his matutinal occupation he crept often to the hoard and cast hungry eyes at the feast. After his tub, while he was cooking his bubbling pint of brown chocolate, as the kindling lighted in his toy fireplace, and during the inspiration of his first cigarette, he came and returned, saving epicurean investigation until, thoroughly prepared for a new day, he bolstered himself upon his couch and disemboweled the messengers of this new flirtation, one by one, with a paper-cutter.

See Mr. Roulhac Braghampton, very quiet now, enveloped by the invisible smoke of incense, for the letters breathed the sweet odor of flattery and promise. So, while he inhales the perfume, let us whisper aside that Roulhac was, with all his gentlemanly roystering, as bold a carpet knight as ever let loose a glance at a fair widow or stormed



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a battery of kisses on a corner of the staircase. He was what is, in feminine parlance, termed "promiscuous," which means that he earned his spurs only after several engagements. He was as one who always travels with a gun; at the first sight of game he shot; he was never unprepared. An open door was to him an unmistakable invitation to enter, a glance from a saucy eye drew him on as by a cord; in short, Roulhac lived well along the line, sharp and fit for any emergency.

But he blanched, in spite of himself, before this fusillade. His correspondent nearly prostrated him with her shrapnel, and her adjectives exploded in his brain with disaster. He had answered her advertisement in the *Matrimonial Exchange*, as debonairly as he had taken up four thousand other fancies, in response to the piquant diction with which her text was strewn. It was not the custom in the *Exchange* for desirous ladies to appeal to the intellects of amorous aspirants. Rather did they probe the masculine appetite with specific details of physical conformity. They wrote themselves down, for the most part, as "five feet six inches" and as "130 pounds"; they proclaimed themselves "dark-complected" and as possessing a "kind and affectionate nature," and one and all specified as their object "a wish to marry a suitable, loving, elderly gentleman, of temperate habits and fond of home life. No objection to a widower. References and photos exchanged."

She who was catalogued in the *Matrimonial Exchange* as "No. 2465," however, demanded "wit, the education of travel, and a smooth-shaven face." She claimed the possession of a "tolerable sensibility and a genuinely natural figure," and, in all simplicity, she wanted "only to be adored." What wonder this bait led Mr. Braghampton

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into the trap! His reply had been swift and ardent, the whole steeped in a rollicking humor. It was this that had let down upon him the present deluge, and Kitty Carmine, as she signed herself, had sent him enough incentive to put him through all his paces from reckless braggadocio to sentimental pathos. It was up to him now to reflect these rays of promise.

Filling his pipe, he sat down at his casement opposite the eternal violet mountains to inscribe his responses. To each note he fitted a reply, answering mood for mood, boast for boast, as if every letter were written by a separate subliminal self, colored with a unique personality.

Before this he had regarded women as "easy." They played the same old game, he was wont to observe, and he knew every possible gambit. Well, he was to play fifty games at once now, and those blindfold. Would she take the same moves, ask the same immortal questions? Would she ask him "WHY he loved her and HOW MUCH he loved her and for HOW LONG?" Would she take his temperature every fifteen minutes, and demand the answers to the questions she knew were unanswerable to a man who has known more than four women in his life? So be it. He could still counter, parry and feint and lunge; what did he care? Softly, as his pen scratched, he hummed the air:

*"'Tis well to be on with the new love
Before you are off with the old!"*

Nevertheless, keen as he was, it took a day in the doing, this amorous battle, and the afternoon came and went before his assault was mustered, deployed and charged. From the Pacific the great army of the fog had massed and already,



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at sunset, the vanguard of light cavalry mists scouted in through the Gate, riding high and gray past Point Bonita, and behind, the clouds packed and started, marching slowly in great gray volumes past the Heads. In the bay the fight was imminent between Darkness, Wind, and Fog, and the outposts were harried with confusion as the breezes met the incoming torrent. The night fell, and from afar the wailing siren at the Lime Point light sobbed into the sea. Still Roulhac wrote, blotted, sealed, and addressed.

The pangs of hunger smote him below the belt towards six o'clock, and he arose, yawning, to appease the famine. As he sat before his open fire, broiling a chop upon the point of a Japanese sword, he conjured a few last spells, and, gulping down the mutton with a soft shredded biscuit or two dipped in raw egg, he lighted four candles and despatched the remaining letters with swift succession. One tenth of a grain of strychnia in a glass of water hastened the finish, and he arose unsteadily, looked in the glass, and cursed gently, soothingly to himself.

"Saint Chrysostom!" he ejaculated. "I look like the spanking committee of an orphan asylum after a hard day's session!"

In an access of pride and relief, he donned evening dress, stuffed the batch of letters in the pockets of his Inverness and opened his front door. The fog swept the base of the hill, extinguishing the constellation of lights he was used to see below, and from the heart of the city a jangle of noises arose, piercing the vapor. He set out, with a virtuous glow of exhaustion. It was as if he had earned money, that day, for he felt the sting of accomplishment enliven him. After all, his day had but just begun, and he



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ventured to hope for a new marvel before he saw the Peanut Shell again.

A fat, voluptuous cigar reconciled him with the sordidness of the streets as he walked down through the penumbra. His hands were in his pockets, and he strolled leisurely as if to meet some timely appointment with Destiny. To him the city was like a plum cake, and he was a John Horner who could find a pleasant mystery at every block; he would stick in his thumb when he felt in the mood; just now he must digest his last romance.

As he dropped down the steep streets the cable cars toiled uphill, clanging with gongs; their headlights, piercing the fog, cast long arrows of yellow glare. Chinatown sent up her odors in whiffs of stinking oil, opium, and joss-sticks, and from far away came the *pum-pum* of the Salvation Army's band. He made a detour to rid himself of all this activity, and struck into a side street, but always working, as if by attraction, towards the focus of San Francisco life at Market Street and the corner by Lotta's Fountain. Of a sudden the Tenderloin was upon him, and he debouched into Geary Street and turned towards the newspaper towers looming above the mist towards the ferry.

He had now become one amongst the many *boulevardiers*, alive to the exhibition of street and pavement, and had begun to revolve in his mind some plan for the evening's entertainment. He was in the middle of the block between Mason and Powell Streets, when he was startled by the sight of a two-horsed equipage careering across his path, issuing, as it seemed to his suddenly excited fancy, from the very walls of the house in front of him! On inspection, however, he saw that it had emerged from a narrow little street which penetrated the middle of the block and whose sides



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were strictly enclosed by the walls of the adjacent houses. As he had passed that opening many times without noticing the place, he turned in to explore the passage. This, at the far end, ran into a short and narrow street, both of whose extremities were closed by high whitewashed board fences surmounted by wistaria vines. The alley, with its two arms or branches, formed a sort of T, and was called, as he saw by the sign on a lamp-post, Key Court.

The whole was paved with asphalt without sidewalks and was completely shut in by buildings, most of which were two-story wooden houses, painted white with green blinds, in the style of the earlier days of the town. The air of the place offered the greatest contrast to that of the busy street outside, and Roulhac fell to studying its charms with the pride of discovery. A solitary gas lamp cast a glimmer of light on the wet pavement by the junction of the ways, but, save for one or two windows that shone faintly behind lace curtains, the rest of the court hid dim and secret in the mist.

The little area lay remote and hugger-mugger in the center of the town. It had a character of its own; it was, one might say, a place, if not with a past, with at least a future. It was set like the scene on a stage awaiting the entrance of the players. With a low hum the night voices of the city were tuning, like the strings of a great orchestra.

Chapter Two

NO. 7, KEY COURT

*Such a drench of balderdash,
Such a strange carded cunningness.*

(The Woman's Prize.)



ROULHAC had already decided to return, when, at the farther end of the court, a door was thrown open, casting a fan of yellow light into the street, and then quickly and silently it closed. He had just time to spy the figure that emerged before the illumination faded, but he was able to follow the approach of the issuant through the obscurity in the shadow of the wooden fence. As he drew near, Roulhac made him out to be a gentleman in a frock-coat, a man of some sixty years, stout, collarless, with a bullet head half thatched with sponge-colored hair. He ambled down the court in a red-striped shirt and suspenders, intent upon something ahead of him, at which he gesticulated authoritatively. Still nearer, a certain stiffness marked him as a man who had seen military adventure, though he now was of a spirit decayed with alcohol. His eyes bulged with an intent passion, but from them downward, his face fell weak and insignificant.

He zigzagged down the way, waving and pointing his arms, intent upon some obsession, some wild whim Roulhac could not fathom. Another tack across the court brought



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the two together with a banging buffet which seemed to rally the old man's wits.

His face loosened and he grabbed the young man's arm with a tight grip, gazing into Roulhac's eyes with a startling fervor.

"For God's sake," he cried, in a thin, wavering voice, "has n't Lee come up yet?" He turned and took a grand posture. "My right's smashed into powder, and I can't hold ten minutes! We're falling back all along the line. Hell's bells! Where's Lee?"

Roulhac stood silent, gaping at the vagary, at a loss for words. Then, at sight of a brown dachshund coming down the court with much divagation, an idea came into his head as slyly as a cartridge is slipped into a pistol.

"There's Lee!" he exclaimed. He violently turned the oldster's head and swung it into range of the quadruped. The ancient stared wildly, but his gaze was aimed. Then, as the suggestion took fire, his mouth went off.

"My God, it's Lee! Thank the Lord! See, he's swinging into position! Now he fires! There's a charge, by the Sons of Hell! Look!" He held to the young man with the grip of a Nuremberg virgin and followed the dog's silly progress. "Gimme cavalry like that, and I'll drive Satan and all his pea-green devils out of the bleeding Pit!" he cried. Then, as the dog turned and approached, his face grew chalk. "Damnation!" he yelled in terror. "It's not Lee! It's the enemy! They're coming!" He broke and ran back a few steps, then rose to a magnificent gesture. "Rally, rally, we'll hold 'em yet! Wait till they are in range, now, and give 'em purple pestilence!"

The dog crawled up, smelled of the old warrior's leg, and whined. "Let 'em vell," he cried, "we'll give 'em some-



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thing to yell at!" and, with a vigorous kick, he sent the beast howling through the fog in a somersault. "Victory!" he cried. "Victory!"

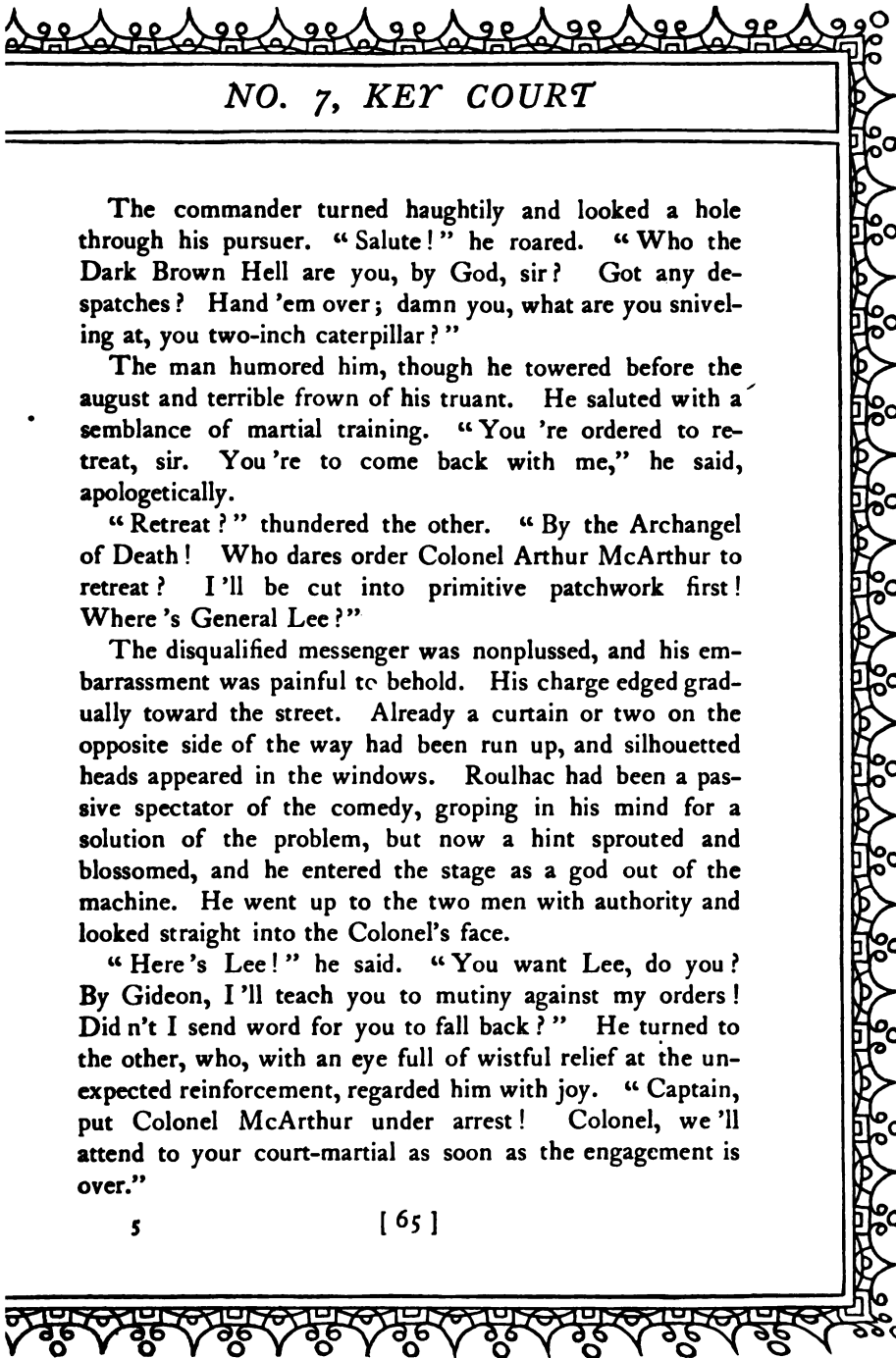
The repetition of the sentiment exhausted him, and he sank upon the steps of the nearest house and put his hand to his head. "Water," he murmured. "Water, water! I'm wounded!"

Dumfounded at the spectacle of this extravagant drama, Roulhac stood, his eyes fascinated by the extraordinary display the old man had vouchsafed. That this blood-curdling ruffian was out of his head was easy to perceive, and yet, somehow, he seemed to be neither entirely mad nor vulgarly drunk. The show moved its auditor with alternate bewilderment and mirth. In its juxtaposition of tragedy and comedy the by-play was like an atrocious nightmare; Roulhac looked to see the actor go up suddenly in smoke.

But, as he recovered control of his nerves, the old man arose, cast an important glance around, and marched stolidly down the court with blatant pomp.

At this moment the door of the house at the end of the court was reopened, a pair of feet clattered down the painted wooden steps, and a new figure came hurrying up to the lamp-post. The comer was of a more commonplace type, of a rounder build, with puffy cheeks, a florid countenance, and huge gold spectacles under bushy eyebrows. Altogether, he was the type of a retired merchant and *bon viveur*. He was hatless, and wore evening dress. He gave Roulhac a furtive, purblind glance as he sweltered by; an anxious look it was, as if fearful of a spectator's curiosity. He ran up to the military stranger and snatched his arm, as a mother captures an errant child.

"Here, come along back with me!" he cried, wheedling.



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The commander turned haughtily and looked a hole through his pursuer. "Salute!" he roared. "Who the Dark Brown Hell are you, by God, sir? Got any despatches? Hand 'em over; damn you, what are you sniveling at, you two-inch caterpillar?"

The man humored him, though he towered before the august and terrible frown of his truant. He saluted with a semblance of martial training. "You're ordered to retreat, sir. You're to come back with me," he said, apologetically.

"Retreat?" thundered the other. "By the Archangel of Death! Who dares order Colonel Arthur McArthur to retreat? I'll be cut into primitive patchwork first! Where's General Lee?"

The disqualified messenger was nonplussed, and his embarrassment was painful to behold. His charge edged gradually toward the street. Already a curtain or two on the opposite side of the way had been run up, and silhouetted heads appeared in the windows. Roulhac had been a passive spectator of the comedy, groping in his mind for a solution of the problem, but now a hint sprouted and blossomed, and he entered the stage as a god out of the machine. He went up to the two men with authority and looked straight into the Colonel's face.

"Here's Lee!" he said. "You want Lee, do you? By Gideon, I'll teach you to mutiny against my orders! Did n't I send word for you to fall back?" He turned to the other, who, with an eye full of wistful relief at the unexpected reinforcement, regarded him with joy. "Captain, put Colonel McArthur under arrest! Colonel, we'll attend to your court-martial as soon as the engagement is over."



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The Colonel broke down into a whimper and put his arms round the messenger's neck. "My God, I'm ruined! What'll I do? God knows I only wanted to die at my post! You know that, don't you? Shot at daybreak for disobedience of orders in action! Oh, Lord, save me!" The other led him back with comforting words, and with this wretched parley the three drew to the door of the house. The situation mastered, Roulhac lapsed into his place as spectator, though determined to see an end of the affair. This the third man noticed, and his discomfort returned.

"Much obliged, much obliged, I'm sure. Thank you very much, sir; really you've helped me no end. You've been of great assistance. Here's the headquarters, Colonel, four steps up, now; there, forward, sir! I'm much obliged to you, sincerely obliged. Forward, Colonel, steady! Thank you no end, you've helped out tremendously. Right ahead, Colonel, there!"

He pushed the prisoner through the door, half closed it and stood on the steps, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, glancing nervously inside to make sure his charge was safe, and evidently anxious to be rid of his new acquaintance. Inside was a long entry laid with a strip of green carpet. There were several doors leading from this passage, and from it rose a staircase, opposite the white vestibule in which they stood. The house, however, was, for all visible signs, deserted.

Roulhac was ungentlemanly enough to persist. The means this fat gentleman in dress coat had taken to quiet his charge seemed inconsistent with the methods of a keeper of a private asylum, and the Braghampton curiosity, potent and paramount when excited, was sharply bitten by

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the mystery. He was hard against an adventure and was in no mood to be fobbed off at the threshold. He determined to push his advantage.

"You'd better let me go in and help you with him," he suggested, presently. "The Colonel needs quieting, and you've seen that I can handle him. I'll stay with you till he's calmed down."

The other kindled with some fear or suspicion at this. "No, no!" he said, hurriedly, with his eyes still fumbling inside the hallway. "I can manage him all right now. Good-night, sir, I'm very much obliged. Thank you so much; you've been a great help. I don't know what I should have done, really. Good-night, sir, I'm very much obliged!" and he entered the hall.

His fear betrayed him, and Roulhac put his foot deliberately across the sill to prevent the closing of the door. The man was evidently of too weak a fiber to resist, if bullied, and he was already shuffling. But, as he opened his mouth to answer, some noise from within braced his resolve. His presence was, no doubt, imperatively demanded, and he faltered between the two fires, fidgeting in an agony of uncertainty, when an electric bell sounded, singing a thin and persistent note. The man's face flushed crimson, and he cast an uneasy glance upward.

Then, "Gimme your card," he said to Roulhac. "I can't stay here a minute longer. You got to let me shut the door. I'll call and see you tomorrow, I swear to God I will, if you let me go now. Perhaps they'll let you in, but if you make any trouble here I won't be responsible for you."

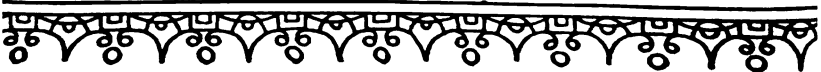
Roulhac handed over a card with his address. The old man grabbed it, and said: "You keep your mouth shut,



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mind you, or you'll be sorry!" Then, with a swift kick, he attacked the foot on the threshold and vigorously slammed the door. The next minute he was heard running upstairs.

The play was, for the moment, over, and Roulhac Braghampton retired down the court, his head whirling with an ecstasy of perplexity. What did it mean? He would know tomorrow, if the fat man kept his word; if not, he would look at the place again. He noted the number, 7, an easy figure to remember, appropriate as it was to mystery. From there he followed the procession of doors. Number 5, a discreet abode, whose entrance was half hidden by a low awning; number 3, a one-story frame that bore the sign "Pedigreed Belgian Hares, Golden West Rabbitry, P. Goslinson." Number 1 was dark within, but, standing at an angle of the street, was meagerly illuminated by the gas-lamp. In the window he perceived a young woman standing, but, before he had had time to notice more than her light blue gown and her auburn hair, she withdrew from her post. On the other branch of the court there stood a Chinese laundry, a stable, and a few residences similar to those he had noticed.

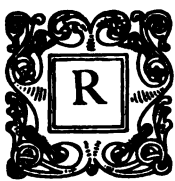


Chapter Three

MR. BRAGHAMPTON ENTERTAINS

I would fain see the careful fool deluded!

(Bartholomew Fair.)



ROULHAC BRAGHAMPTON, at an hour too scandalous to mention, returned to Vallejo Street, climbing the goat path that escalades the eastern slope of Russian Hill. At the top he stood a few minutes, orey-eyed, and gazed upon the display below him. San Francisco had withdrawn her mantle of fog and sprawled at his feet in an uneasy posture. The little wooden boxes which serve for architecture in this strange land covered hill and valley, clinging to slope and hollow, furrowed with straight and narrow streets defying the topography of the peninsula. The lights sown over this vast rolling tract of mountainous land were fading, one by one. The odors still came up from Chinatown, where the Oriental pot bubbled night and day, but fewer noises rose from the gut where Market Street lay. A solitary locomotive, important and demonstrative, perfervent with the world's traffic, screamed from the freight sheds on Tar Flat.

“In one of these little wooden houses, pale and flat under the stars,” thought Roulhac, “lives the mysterious Kitty Carmine! In which one?” And with this vision peaceful at his door, he went in and lay down upon his bed.

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He was awakened at nine in the morning by his telephone bell and groped to the receiver, a dazed emigrant from Dreamland, to be greeted by a musical feminine voice that he did not recognize.

"Is this Mr. Braghampton?" it inquired.

"It will be, as soon as I am awake."

"Wake up, then, for you will need all your wits!"

"To whom am I indebted for this reveille?"

"E Pluribus Unum! I am Fifty!" the voice proclaimed.

"Kitty Carmine!" was the entranced return.

"And in which of your half-hundred moods do I find you?"

"In fifty new ones!"

"I believe you. You're accepted!"

"I never proposed!"

"Never mind, I have fifty breach of promise cases against you; you can't escape!" mocked the little voice in the wire.

"Where do you live?" pleadingly.

"On Hyde Street, of course! Gosling! Do you think I would tell you?"

"When shall I see you?"

"Soon, but you'll not know me."

"Nor you me, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, I have your true name, you know."

"Really? How?"

"Never mind. I have no time to explain now, but you'll learn soon enough. Today I have a favor to ask you. I'll know, from the way you answer me, how you value the affair. Promise me you'll assent to any request that is made you this day!"

Roulhac hesitated while the nickel-plated alarm clock on



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his bureau pulsed thrice, and then, casting aside discretion, which, though it may be the better part of valor, has little place in a modern flirtation, he said, "I promise!"

"Good-bye, then!" said the lady. "I'll try to make it worth your while!"

Worth while, indeed! Though Roulhac Braghampton lives to be a nonagenarian, though he palsy, dote, and crumple as the fading leaf, he will yet collapse with hysteria at the thought of all she brought about. Though he grow misogynist or gynophobiatic, one woman will be free from his disregard. The tinkle of Kitty Carmine's laughter shall flow when the falls of Minnehaha dry in their unmade bed.

The morning's mail, although not so sensational as that of the day before, kept Roulhac busy till nearly noon, and he was still in his dingy, patched red flannel bath-robe when a knock at the door apprised him of the advent of a visitor. Few hazarded the climb to the summit of Russian Hill without urgent business or ardent affection, and the occupant of the Peanut Shell suspected that his fat friend of yesterday's almost Arabian night's entertainment had honored him.

It was so indeed, and, as Mr. Braghampton answered the summons, he beheld the unwieldy guardian of No. 7 Key Court in the Liliputian front yard admiring the view through his spectacles, still panting from his struggle up the ascent. He turned, with a scarlet face, as the door was opened.

"Ugh!" he said. "Devilish climb, this. How-de-do, Mr. Braghampton? D'you really live up here with the goats?"

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"It *is* a bit desperate," Roulhac replied, "but we get used to it, and the inaccessibility serves to prove our friends. I'm charmed to find you so punctual. Come in, please. There's hardly room for two and the mortgage, but we'll make a fierce, supernal try at it!"

They entered the cottage and sat down upon a pink couch beneath bookshelves. The visitor cleared his throat.

"My name is Rappp," he began, "R, a, double p, p; three *p*'s, you know."

"Extraordinary way to spell it," Roulhac observed, as comment seemed to be called for.

"Quite so, quite so; I flatter myself it is very unique, my name. But you'll find only two *p*'s in the directory; they positively refuse to spell it correctly. I'm often addressed that way, with two *p*'s; in fact, people sometimes use only one. Beasts!"

"Well," said Roulhac, "people always misspell one's name, you know, Mr. Rappp," and he pronounced the final consonants with emphasis. "You ought to think yourself lucky if they don't call you 'Rapps.'"

"They *do*, damn 'em!" said his visitor.

"I must say," Roulhac went on, "I am consumed with curiosity in regard to last night's adventure. I'm so glad you took the trouble to call up here and do me the honor."

"I have my instructions and I must follow them, so you must n't blame me if I don't entirely satisfy you. You see, you stumbled into something that's usually kept pretty dark. It would n't do to have the thing get into the papers, you know. It's square, and all that," he hastened to explain, "but you see it's a bit new, and you know how the yellow supplements take up a novelty. One can't be too careful. Besides, it's nobody's business but the members'."



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"Oh, I see," said his host. "A club, I presume."

"Exactly," said Mr. Rapp. "A gentleman's club, and strictly private."

"What's the little game?" said Roulhac, gently.

Mr. Rapp shook his head so violently that his ears nearly dropped off. "*Oh!* No, there's no play allowed. Looks like a private gambling-house, you think? Not at all, sir! Merely for entertainment *and* culture."

"I hardly see why you need such secrecy," Roulhac ventured.

"As I said, I am not at liberty to tell you. I will say, however, that the entertainment provided for members is not only extraordinarily amusing, but practically inaccessible to ordinary persons."

"Against the law, perhaps," said Roulhac, blowing forth a smoke-ring.

"Wrong again!" said Rapp. "Only because it's unknown, and not understood or appreciated if it were n't."

Roulhac wondered in vain what new and mysterious pleasure was purveyed in No. 7 Key Court. "Women?" he suggested, at last.

"Never!" cried his visitor. "Better give it up. You'll never guess. I could n't, though I'm twenty years your senior," which by his tone appeared to give the final proof of impossibility.

"Then, if you can't tell me more than I already know, I'll be quartered if I see why you have taken the trouble to climb this hill."

"See here," the other explained with a placating gesture, "I was ruffled at your persistence and *insistence* the other evening, I confess. I ain't used to it from boys who might be my sons. But in spite of that I don't know as I blame

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you. Young blood, you know, and all that sort of thing! I liked the look of you. Besides, there's been influence brought to bear, when your name was read on the card. We want new members, and there are three vacancies. And it's damned hard to find the right sort of men, too. It's irregular to let you in this way, and all that, but as I say, you've got a pretty good reputation for nerve and cleverness, and so on. Not enough to elect you, perhaps, but you can be a candidate if you want. Would you like to try it on? I warn you fairly, you may be blackballed, and it's a pig in poke for you; but if you're not game we don't want you. See?"

Roulhac did not see at all. But he was not the man to look too hard before he leapt. He had done ten thousand madder things without winking. "Cost much?" he inquired.

"Merely nominal. Rent of clubhouse and salaries of service. But we're very economical. It varies. Ten dollars a month, maybe."

"All right. Me for the fatal plunge," assented the scallawag. "What do I have to do to qualify?"

"I'll tell you. Glad you're not a paper sport. You'll do, all right, I'm sure. Here you have it. You're to be at Campi's restaurant on Clay Street, Friday noon, for lunch. Take the third table in the second row, counting from the window. See here!" He took out a stub of pencil and drew a diagram on a sheet of paper. "Here's the front by the windows; upstairs, you understand. Here's the stairway. Row of tables along the partition, row of tables down the middle, row of tables on the side by the stairs. You're in the middle. First table by the window, second table, third; there you are. Number the seats; one, two, three, four. You sit down in Number three."



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Roulhac folded up the paper and put it into his pocket. "But what if it's taken?"

"It won't be taken, we'll attend to that. Besides, you're to be there at twelve, sharp, and stay till two."

"Who's to take the other seats?"

"Anybody. Never mind them. You've got nothing to do but eat your lunch. Get a good one. Don't try to find out anything more."

"Oh, I see!" said Roulhac. "The club members will lunch there, too, and know I'm to be present and watch me. Godfrey! That's fey!"

"We won't judge you by your table manners, though, don't be afraid. Meanwhile we'll look you up. But the members want to see a man before they let him in, and naturally they don't want to be identified themselves. See? Well, if you've got that straight, I'll go. Friday at twelve. Goo-by!"

He had risen, shaken hands, and was about to leave, when his eye caught, through a half-opened door, a narrow view of the inner room. His eye hung there for a second, and then he turned on the young man with ferocity.

"The devil!" he cried. "There's a woman in that room. We've been overheard!"

"There's no woman there," Roulhac protested. "Look for yourself!" He flung open the door and entered. Half-way in, he stopped and a smile grew on his face. "Oh yes!" he said. "I forgot. But she has n't been listening, I give you my word. Allow me to introduce you to Miss Harmony, Mr. Rappp."

The lady in question stood upright with a rigid pose, auburn of hair and with pink round cheeks, looking abstractedly at the opposite wall. She was neatly, one



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might say stylishly arrayed, if the cut of her garments had not been, to the practiced eye, significant of the styles of a year or more ago. Her hands hung rather stiffly at her sides, and, as the two drew nearer, she made no sign of recognition or greeting. This, however, was not so remarkable as it would have been had she not been made of wax and wood, with glass eyes which were incapable of movement. Mr. Braghampton's female friend was, in short, a draped lay figure, such as dwell commonly within the narrow limits of a plate glass show window.

"My word!" exclaimed Mr. Rapp, approaching her with a certain shyness. "A dummy, by Jimminy-Jove! And do you know, I fancied that I recognized her! Shows what a bad conscience will do! How the devil do you happen to have this piece of pink perfection in your sitting-room?"

"It's a long story," Roulhac drawled, "and I'll not bore you with it, except for the fact that my father was, at one time, in the dry-goods and mantle business. When the firm dissolved, I appropriated this figure and I've kept it here ever since. The fact is, it's by way of being a composite of several of my friends."

"Queer sort of dolls you must run with," said Mr. Rapp.

"Oh, not the head, you know; that might be any girl's," Roulhac explained, "but the clothes. I've borrowed, or pinched, or had presented to her everything she's got on. This skirt was given me by a girl I flirted with at Monterey. The shirt-waist belonged to a sunset blonde up at Castle Crags — you'd know the name if I told you; it's in the society column every week — and the hat has been frequently seen at San Rafael." He turned up the skirt.





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“Fervid petticoats, eh? They belonged to — never mind! Oh, she’s complete, even to Jaegers. I’m not disclosing *their* authorship, of course, but — well, you understand. Swell girls, all of ’em — *rudement chic!* Oh, Miss Harmony’s a silk-lined thoroughbred, I assure you! She’s a pretty hot piece of pie, she is, I give you *my* word if anyone should ring you up and inquire! Green stockings, too! How they carry me back! A girl in London bought ’em for her and wore ’em once to give ’em atmosphere. Gladys, kiss your hand to the fat gentleman! She speaks French, too, when she talks at all, *par la fanfaronnade!* Luckily, she’s dumb. Bye-bye, Glad!”

“Say, you’re a queer stick!” said Mr. Rapp. “You’re fertile, by Crickey! You can help us lots with suggestions, you can. We’ll have to have you, sure! Say, you’re all right, all right!”

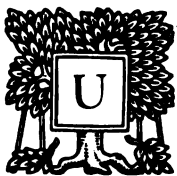
And with this remark he took his leave and climbed cautiously down the Hill.

Chapter Four

A LUNCH AT CAMPI'S

So I meant. What is she? A bonnibel?

(The Alchemist.)



UPSTAIRS at Campi's was a long, low room with sanded floor, filled by three rows of tables running from the French windows overlooking Clay Street back to the partitions shutting off the kitchen in the rear. Between the dingy lace curtains of the windows, on a wall bracket, stood the dusty bust of Campi *père*, the original founder of the establishment, gazing down, between fierce moustaches trimmed *à la* Vittor Emmanuello, upon the *habitués* of the restaurant. Below, in the main room, there was a clatter of plates and spoons, as clerks and book-keepers gulped through their half-hour lunch; above it was more quiet. Here the regular customers gathered in little cliques and took their time over long cigars, and the waiters served with less briskness. Here, too, more ladies appeared: pretty typewriters, the cashiers of small business houses, the proprietress of the bindery next door, and so on.

Here, in the old days, Barowich presided. Barowich the Slav, whose mother was a countess and had disinherited him. Not to know Barowich by name was a badge of the alien; to his regular customers he was an old friend, and he would linger at the table after the room had thinned, and



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would show you the miniature of his lady mother, set in dull pearls, and talk of Italy and Botticelli.

Roulhac was early at his appointment, and, entering the upper hall and looking for his position, found that, at the table where he was to sit, all the chairs were placed backwards, in sign that the place was reserved. A waiter came up and regarded him intently. "Is this table taken?" said Roulhac.

"Would you mind telling me your name, sir?" said Barowich.

"Braghampton," said Roulhac, in some surprise at the inquisition.

"All right," said the waiter, and he turned the chairs back to their normal position.

Roulhac sat down and shook the napkin out of the glass in front of him lazily, looking curiously about the room, with which he was not familiar. There were as yet few occupants. The corner table, by the window, always the most popular, was taken by two women. One of them, sitting with her back to him, he could not well make out; the other, facing him, had heavy eyebrows and black hair pulled out in a flourish over her ears. Her costume was loud and cheap; it was evident she was from the south of Market Street slot; and he transferred his attention to the other end of the room, where a portly German was eating soup with audible gusto. Here, again, he found little to interest him. It was evident that he was not regarded and must wait for further visitors.

The place began to fill up, and the room before long bustled with activity. At half-after-twelve the business men of the vicinity, printers, market men, and paper merchants, began to arrive. As they entered, Roulhac gave



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each one a searching glance, but he had little clue to go by and he soon gave up the investigation. Here one or another might be a possible member of the club, but there was small satisfaction in the surmise.

And yet, as he proceeded with his lunch, the feeling that he was being watched grew upon him. He caught, it is true, no direct glance, but all about him he knew the spies of the mysterious organization to be placed. They might be at his right or his left, facing him, or behind. There was no knowing, but the feeling made him awkward and self-conscious. He succeeded in spilling a bottle of red wine upon the tablecloth, which did not increase his peace of mind. His food remained untasted, but he made a bold pretense of appetite and nursed his lunch that it might last as long as possible. Behind him, in the corner by the stair, was a table set for eight, and here a gay company assembled, whose laughter, loud talking, and congeniality proclaimed them frequenters of the place. He caught now and then an easy, obvious jest, and he wondered if he were to become the associate of such a crew as that. His mind turned backward at the thought.

So far the ordeal bored him, and he had conceived a huge disgust at the undignified situation in which he was placed, when a lady entered, and, after casting an inquisitive look about the room, approached his table and sat down directly opposite him. It was, in point of fact, almost the only place now vacant, and its selection showed no signs of premeditation. Nevertheless, the possibility set Roulhac on the *qui vive*. It gave an entirely new turn to the affair, in his mind, and he began to view it with a renascent interest.

She removed her veil slowly, revealing a coil of hair of



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that particular shade of red for which Titian and numberless imitators have given us an acquired taste. The color was, in short, what any painter would term "wonderful," and it accompanied that dazzling complexion with which it is usually associated. Her mouth was small, but mischievously curved; two nimble, entertaining dimples punctuated her cheeks, and her eyebrows wrote humor upon her face; her eyes, when she let them open to their full size, shone blue as deep-sea water. She wore a costume described in the fashion-books as "jaunty." A blue waist, dotted with white, trimmed with gold braid in military style, adorned with brass buttons, and a belt, captured, no doubt, without a struggle from some devoted ensign in the navy. From this depended a collection of *bijouterie* strung on a gold chain. She drew off her gloves, and, with the fraction of a second's peep at her *vis-à-vis*, she contemplated the printed *menu*. Her white left hand drew the alert Braghampton eye, for on its fourth finger was a Regard ring, fastened by a crossed gold chain to her wrist — a piece of piquantly amusing idiocy that pleased him well. Thus posed as if for a photograph by Genthe, or a cover for *Jugend*, she was as nearly perfect as anything at which Roulhac Braghampton had ever loosed a giddy glance.

At any other time such a delirious flirt as Roulhac Braghampton would have attempted his wiles upon the fair creature at his table. He was not the kind to make goo-goo eyes, or ogle a beauty out of countenance; his ways were lubricated with tact and delicacy; but now the presence of possible surveillors of his actions kept down his temperature. None the less did he aim many a covert stiletto glance in the direction of his auburn-haired partner, and he could not but perceive that she was conscious of his



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presence. His attention was limited to passing her the salt and oil, and a casual, seemingly accidental, collision with her foot under the table. The cloth being short, he did this with dexterity, nicely calculating the possible angle and range of vision for possible observers. His conceit led him to suspect more danger from them than from her, and, above the table, his demeanor was sobriety itself. He contented himself, then, with admiring her air and style, which had distinction out of accord with the dun and dim apartment. She should have been dining at the *Maison Riche*, he thought, and that, too, with him, *tête-à-tête* upstairs.

Engaged in these alluring fancies, he dabbled [leisurely through his lunch. Whitebait and spaghetti had been dallied with, and he was just about to plunge his knife into a small bird when a commotion at the far end of the room drew his eyes in that direction. There a small, robust lump of a man with eyeglasses and a brown beard was making himself conspicuous. A friend at his side was evidently dissuading him from some exhibition, but the man (he wore a pink shirt with a red necktie) was in revolt. He struggled to his feet, finally, with the other tugging at his coat-tails, and cleared his throat.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he announced. “My subject today is one that promises to revolutionize Modern Science. The question of the possibility of a Fourth Dimension, incomprehensible as it is to our conception of Space, is one that was foreshadowed by Kant, and has since been profoundly investigated by Lobatchewski and other German mathematicians. Today Non-Euclidean geometry is recognized as a possible hypothesis to account for many unanswered problems in Physics and Natural Science. Indeed,



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it has been used by Spiritists to explain several remarkable manifestations, notably at Berne — ”

“ Sit down, for God's sake, sit down ! ” cried the man at his table, a thin creature with a pointed beard, who looked like Shakespeare in a concave mirror. But the audience, amused by this unforeseen entertainment, yelled encouragement and rapped their wineglasses with their knives.

“ At Berne, I repeat, where in an empty room a light appeared underneath a table and cast an *undistorted* shadow in its true size and shape upon the wall, thus proving the light had come from an infinite distance. The mathematical elucidation of the theory of Higher Space, involving as it does Quaternions and Least Squares, is not easily followed by the lay mind, but,” and here he struggled painfully with his oppressor, “ upon the speculative side, the subject is possible of simple illustration.”

He paused for breath, and his friend attacked him more vigorously. Roulhac noticed that all over the room men had risen, some ten or twelve in all, and were evidently more than ordinarily interested in the episode. They got together in twos and threes, and a few made their way down between the tables as if to second the attempts of the man who was trying to interrupt the lecture. Barowich himself hastened to the spot, and spoke to one of the groups in passing. But the professor, for so he appeared, would not down, and after a terrific struggle he broke loose again.

“ I shall not be interrupted ! ” he cried. “ I will go on ! We must proceed by analogy. Suppose, if you will, a Space limited to one dimension — in short, a world where consciousness is limited to a line . . . ”



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While Roulhac had been intent upon the talker, the lady opposite him had risen and glided swiftly down the room till she stood directly in front of the professor. She caught his eye.

"The inhabitants of this linear world," he proceeded, disconcerted, "can conceive of but one direction, back and forth . . . they cannot pass each other . . . but . . . suppose, now, the line to be intersected by a square. . . . It would appear only as two receding points . . . but, to the square. . . ." His voice died out in a mumble, as the lady in the blue blouse whispered in his ear. He collapsed and sat down, took up his fork and attacked his lunch again.

The sprightly beauty returned to her place and resumed her occupation as if nothing unusual had happened. The little knots of excited men disintegrated and took their former places. The rest of the company, after much inquisitive staring at the professor and the lady, recommenced their repast, and in a few minutes the place had taken on its customary aspect.

It was now half-after-one o'clock, and the customers began to leave. One by one they pushed their chairs back, lit cigarettes, and arose. There were some, however, who lingered, and to these, one after another, Roulhac observed Barowich go. He handed each a small slip of paper, and, careful as they were to do so stealthily, Roulhac noticed several of them write upon the checks and return them to the head waiter. It seemed as if they were tipping him at the time; he hardly commented upon the action.

At quarter-to-two the lady opposite him called for her bill, gave Barowich the money in payment, placed a dollar upon the table, and left. She did not do so, however, with-



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out another gaze at Mr. Braghampton, and she even indulged him with a swift, barbed smile as she turned. Roulhac started, at this, to follow her; but, remembering his promise to stay till two o'clock, he remained in his chair, and, palpitant, watched her descend the stair.

It had become patent by this time, to the observation of the young man, that Barowich occupied in that place a far more important figure than that of mere head waiter. So many of the patrons appeared to know him and colloqued him with affability, and his bearing was so distinguished as he presided over the welfare of the guests, that the desire was born in Roulhac's breast for conversation. As Barowich approached him, therefore, Roulhac made a sign.

"Queer sort of business, that speech," he remarked, pleasantly.

"Very strange," said the waiter. "But we see strange sights here at times. Your waiter, like your doctor, probes secrets every day."

"Who was the speaker?" was the next interrogation.

Barowich leaned against an iron pillar unprofessionally. "He's Professor Dolittle, of the University," he answered. "He's an authority on Hyperspace, you know."

"What the devil is Hyperspace?" asked Roulhac

"Speculation, rank speculation; to my mind there's nothing in it. Of course, it's a useful working theory in chemistry, you know; gives a *modus operandi* for the grouping of atoms in molecules of certain volatile hydrocarbons, that can't possibly be done with three-dimensional forms. But it's the professor's fad. You ought to see his models. Projections of Tesseract and Octohedroids upon Three-Space, you know."



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“Indeed,” said Roulhac, marveling at the waiter’s culture. “Have you seen them?”

“Oh yes,” said Barowich. “In fact, I have pointed out to the professor gross inaccuracies in his calculations of the perimetry of certain warped surfaces, and I’m inclined to dispute his authority on such subjects. You are aware, of course, that mathematics is not, strictly, an exact science.”

The subject began to bore his victim, and he turned to more congenial topics. “Who was the young lady sitting opposite me?” he asked. “Do you know her?”

“That was the Countess Rouge,” said Barowich.

“Indeed,” Roulhac remarked. “I would have laid four bits she was an American girl.”

“Wrong; she’s English, and she’s a countess to boot,” Barowich explained. “Beautiful woman, no? Every inch an aristocrat, too, I know, for my mother was of the Polish nobility.”

“She seemed to have a remarkable influence with the professor,” suggested Roulhac; but Barowich’s veil dropped, and he began to resume his capacity as waiter. The young man began again.

“I noticed when I entered that this table had been reserved in the customary manner. May I ask by whose direction?”

Barowich returned to his pose, and, to Roulhac’s surprise, seated himself at the table.

“That brings me to an important matter,” he said. “I am requested to inform you of your election.”

“You don’t say so!” ejaculated the other. “I had no idea a ballot would be taken so soon.”

The waiter took from his pocket a small packet of papers, seemingly torn from the ordinary check-pad of the estab-



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ishment. As he spread them upon the table, each was seen to bear the printed words "Campi's Restaurant, 531 Clay Street, San Francisco." Upon each, also, but in different handwritings, was written in pencil the word "YES."

"There is the official ballot," the waiter explained. "Unanimous, you see."

"But what have you to do with this?" Roulhac inquired. "Is it possible that you belong to the club?" Then, as he considered that his tone of surprise might be misconstrued as scornful, he added: "I'm delighted to meet a fellow-member."

"I have that honor," said Barowich, "and I combine with it the office of *chef de cuisine*. I assure you the club sets a very good table."

"Then, in heaven's name, make me acquainted with the object of this mysterious organization," demanded the other. "I have been in suspense long enough. I want to know whether I join with blacklegs, vaudeville artists, or madmen. I'm as puzzled as a cat in a coffin."

"The time has come," said Barowich. "Here's the scheme in a word. The Hypnotic Club—"

"Oh, yes, of course!" interrupted Roulhac, slapping the table violently, "I might have guessed that. What a blockhead! But how, why, and when?"

"As I was saying," resumed the waiter, smiling, "we are associated together to enable us to entertain ourselves in a way that is not often possible. You know, well enough, the vagaries of the mesmerist, and how a suggestion may be given that will set the subject off on a dream life as real and ten thousand times more agreeable, perhaps, than his waking existence. This is our practice; to meet, and be put into a state of hypnosis, in which condition we



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can pursue any form of entertainment we desire. Each man has a separate room and is well attended. There, as often as he pleases of an evening, he can live the dream-life undisturbed."

"What an idea!" said the initiate. "But I don't care, myself, to put myself in the power of any mesmerist, thank you. I should have investigated this, before accepting the election. It sounds dangerous."

"Nothing could be more harmless. You see, the members take turns in taking the part of hypnotist. Each has an equal part in controlling the others. You yourself, in your turn, put the members that are present on your night into trances and give them the required suggestions."

"But I know nothing of mesmerism."

"You will be instructed. It is easy enough when the subjects are willing to be hypnotized. Now, you are requested to appear for your instruction tomorrow night. I hope you have no engagement for then?"

"No," said Roulhac. "I'll be there."

"Come at eight, sharp, then, and, as it happens to be my night, I'll explain more at detail what you are to read and do, and you will have the opportunity of watching me attend to the members. Here is a key to No. 7 Key Court. Go right in. You may see Rapp and Colonel McArthur, and I think you'll find them more hospitable than they were the other evening.

"Your bill?" he answered, in reply to Roulhac's query. "Never mind that, you are the guest of the club today. Good-bye. I shall expect you tomorrow at eight."

Chapter Five

THE HYPNOTIC CLUB

*Is not this a fantastic house we are in,
And all a dream we do?*

(Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.)



AT eight o'clock precisely, the next evening, Roulhac Braghampton turned into Key Court. The place was dark and quiet save that, from the rabbitry where P. Goslinson bred his Belgian hares, came a sound of muffled pounding. The key fitted, the door opened, and Roulhac found himself at last within the secret precincts of the Hypnotic Club. A door at his left was marked "OFFICE," and here he penetrated cavalierly. The room was narrow and high of ceiling, the walls hung in crimson paper. At a desk sat Barowich, in full evening dress, writing in a blank book. There was a long settee, upholstered in leather, upon which lounged three or four men. Amongst these he recognized Colonel Arthur McArthur, now quite sane. Beside him was Rapp, smoking a tiny cigar and reading an enormous book.

All three rose to welcome him, and he was formally presented to the other members. Colonel McArthur began the conversation.

"I don't know how to apologize for the ass I made of myself," he began. "The fact is, my door was left unlocked and I escaped. I was fighting the battle of Antie-



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tam, you understand, and thought I was making a forced march. I had hard enough work to escape the enemy, here, I assure you," and he pointed to Rapp.

"You saved us from a very disagreeable scene," said Mr. Rapp, looking up from his book, a profound work on microscopy.

"Let me show you the place before the rest of the members arrive," interrupted Barowich, slamming his accounts upon the desk. "This is, as you see, the general office. Here is a list of members, showing the rotation of the office of controller." He ran his finger down the line. "My night, you see—your turn will come in a week, unless some of the others fail. Here's our library; Moll, Binet and Feré, Charcot, Prince, all the best authorities, including the suppressed report of the French Academy on Mesmer's experiments. We're of the newer German school and follow pure suggestion. Braid was all right, but the mirrors and things he used to paralyze the sight or hearing and so on are but a *pis aller*. You'll discover the difference between Mesmerism and Hypnotism soon. Animal Magnetism, perhaps, comes nearer the mark, but the name signifies little. The passes and the staring eyeballs help to fascinate the subject, but it's purely mental. It depends far more upon the subject than the hypnotist. Now we're all good subjects, because we help the controller and are willing to give ourselves up to his influence. There's a grill-room in the rear where you can get a very good sprig, teal, or mallard at this time of the year, and I'll guarantee that it will be well cooked, for I have the *chef* permanently under my influence. What I know about sauces and condiments and basting, he knows. It's the same as if I broiled it myself. Upstairs there are ten rooms with



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beds, if you wish to stay all night. Each one is numbered, every member has his own apartment. You are in Number 8. Like to see it?"

But, as more of the members now came in, Roulhac contented himself with meeting them and shaking hands. A tray of drinks was brought in; mild cocktails, Barovich explained, so as not to interfere with the trance to be invoked, and then each member went to his room. Barovich and Roulhac were left alone in the office.

"It goes without saying," said the waiter, "that all you see and hear is in strict confidence. You're not to mention one member's affairs, even to another. You're to suggest any subject a member requests provided it's not immoral or constituting a statutory offense. We've got to be careful of the good name of the club. Each room is connected with the office by an electric bell and this annunciator. Here is a list of the times the members are to be wakened, but it's usual practice to suggest it to the subject when he's put into his trance. The bells are more for emergencies. Now we'll come up. Usually we begin with the first man who comes in, and the others wait their turn."

He led the way upstairs into the upper hall and opened the door of Number 1. A gentleman in a dressing-gown was lying upon the lounge. His hair and moustaches were elaborately curled and bore suspicion of dye. Roulhac had marked the foppery of his manner in the office, where he swaggered as only an old buck can. His fingers were covered with rings, and, though he appeared in a polite negligé every article of his apparel was elegant, in the extreme of style. One would imagine him a lady-killer who could count his affairs by thousands. His feet were

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enclosed in patent-leather shoes several sizes too small. To crown the ridiculous vanity of this coxcomb, he held in his arms a wax doll, the largest Roulhac had ever seen, bedecked in a garment of an ultra-modish make. Underneath her blonde wig a pair of staring eyes looked out and questioned the ceiling. As the two entered, the gentleman, who had been introduced as Mr. Ruby, arose and placed his charge upon the chair beside him, then seated himself and composed his features for the séance.

"The same old game," he requested, with a smirk.

Barowich approached and made a few passes. The man's eyes, at first fixed upon the controller, grew glassy; then the lids fell, and in a few minutes he breathed heavily, fast asleep. Barowich turned from the unconscious subject and explained:

"This man, whom you might take for a gallant of the first water, is of so singularly modest a nature that any real pleasure of communication with the other sex is impossible, unbearable, and painful to an excruciating degree. At heart he is a very Lothario; Don Juan and Casanova himself could not equal his imaginary amours. But he is cursed, as I say, with a most immoderate bashfulness — the very sight of a woman turns his knees to water; he is so shy, Mr. Braghampton, I have seen him blush to meet a little girl four years old! The case is most extraordinary, especially as the man has written some of the keenest things of women ever printed. Why, only last month there appeared in *Mimsey's Magazine* a story, over a feminine pseudonym, that has made talk in this town, I assure you. He's the devil-and-all, when he's alone, and will give advice to the youngsters that comes in handy; oh, he knows all the ropes, theoretically, but he dare n't pull 'em."



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“But hypnotism should be the very cure for all this,” suggested Roulhac. “I’ve heard of its efficacy in dentistry and the alcoholic habit, and so on. Why don’t you suggest that he’ll get on all right with the girls?”

“He won’t hear of it,” said Barowich. “I tell you he’s a monomaniac on that subject. He’d rather go into a den of Colorado catamounts than to an afternoon tea.”

“Well, so would I, for that matter,” Roulhac grinned, “but proceed.”

The controller turned to his subject and said, pointing to the doll: “Mr. Ruby, this is Miss Virginia Yerrington, of Pacific Avenue, you know. You are well acquainted with her brother, you remember, and he has told you that the young lady is very much smitten with your charms. I’ve no doubt that she’s expecting a proposal. She’s a bit timid, but you’ll be able to bring her out. The fact is, she’s jealous, for she’s heard of that affair of yours with Belle Gerrish. She’s a nice girl, but she needs educating, and you’re the man to do it. She’s pretty used to compliments; you know the kind. She’s been spoiled, but a man who’s sure of himself can tear the heart out of her and eat her alive. She’s the prettiest peach in San Francisco, and all the women in town are afraid of her, for she’s got brains, to boot. Money, too, but you won’t mind that. It’s up to you, old man; so long!”

The dandy was now sitting upright and twirling his moustache. His eye lighted and he cast it obliquely at his victim, as if estimating her defense. Then he leaned back upon the couch, crossed his legs, and said:

“They say you’re pretty and they say you’re bright. You’ve proven one, of course; now you must make good on the other.” Some inaudible sally from the coun-



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terfeit Miss Yerrington convulsed him, and he leaned towards her with *empressement*. "Well, I'll try to be a match for you, and touch off your skyrocketes, if you have 'em to burn! I would n't have thought you used powder, though!" Here his mouth writhed in what was meant to be a smile of devilish sarcasm.

"That's enough drivel for me," said Roulhac, edging towards the door. "I think we're *de trop*. These things never sound so funny when you hear them as when you say them."

"Why, he imagines that he's having the spiciest sort of a conversation," said the controller. "You've no idea how he'll brag of this. We all magnify our happiness, I suppose," he added, as he closed the door. Mr. Ruby had edged a shade nearer his quarry as they made their exit.

Within the next room they discovered Professor Dottle, he who had stood his ground so well at Campi's. He was busy with pencil and paper, and folding little models of pasteboard. He looked up at the two with a near-sighted inclination.

"I'm all ready," he said. Then, to Braghampton, he added: "I hear you were at Campi's when I made a show of myself. I can't imagine how I came to be possessed that way. Most extraordinary episode. The fact is, I'm investigating the Fourth Dimension along the lines of Professor Hinton's theories. He's the only one of us, you know, who holds that it is possible to build up, by infinitely patient practice, an actual conception of Higher Space objects. On the face of it it's a contradiction of terms, but he thinks we have rudimentary possibilities of comprehending Four-Space at least. I'm following his exercises in analogy with these cubes."

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"Yes, yes, quite so," remarked Roulhac, nervously. "I'm very anxious to see what you say under the influence of hypnotism."

"You won't understand a word, when I get going," remarked the professor, discouragingly, as if his previous discourse had been the veriest A B C. "This Tesseract is all named, you know. Here are the cubes; first face, 'Mars, Merces, Tyro: Spicula, Mora, Oliva: Lars, Tibicen, Vestis,' and so forth. Rather difficult, eh? That's elementary. I have to memorize one hundred and forty-four names in the first cube alone. But we won't waste time now explaining."

At an agonized gesture of appeal from Roulhac, the Controller put the professor into a trance, and the subject began a series of rapid calculations upon the paper, covering sheet after sheet with figures. Looking over his shoulder, Roulhac saw that he had begun with this lucid theorem:

"Suppose Arctos, Cuspis, and Dos are each cut half-way. This figure is an Octo-Tesseract whose sides are the diagonal of a half-unit squared.

The figure $Z X Y$ is also an equilateral triangle

$1.1.1$

and the figure $Z X Y$ is an equilateral hexagon."

$1\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$

He took Barowich's hand and hurried him from the room.

"Give me a little more human nature!" he exclaimed. "That man gets on my nerves. Show me a man with blood in his veins, not ink, even if he's an ass like Ruby!"

Barowich smiled. "You must use philosophy," he said. "This Non-Euclidean fanatic may yet become famous.



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He stands to discover a new era of thought. But we must hurry ; I have taken too much time, the members will grow impatient."

The next visit brought them to a broken-down musician. He was a man who had never left the State in which he was born, but he considered himself competent to criticise any performer living, whether he had heard him or not. At present he was almost stone deaf ; tone-deaf and color-blind, too, many said, and he held an important position as musical and art critic on the great daily of the town. He was a sorry, carping old fool, and his prattle of tone and shading, arpeggios, and scales like strands of pearls, *chiaroscuro* and such bosh, was no more diverting to Roulhac than the madness of the mathematician. He had a toy musical box upon the table and was winding it up as they entered. A few passes, and the critic was in a dream where the picking of the little comb upon the bristled cylinder passed for the strains of divine harmony. With constant winding, Barowich explained, the musical box could be made to produce a half-dozen operas in an evening, and this with an execution and finish that even the critic could not deprecate. They left the man, his eyes closed, his hands clasped, and a meaningful smile upon his foolish face, and turned into the next room.

The arts and sciences were well represented in the club, and it seemed to Roulhac that only professional men had made use of the opportunity for such delights as the hypnotists provided. He began to itch for some stronger bond of fellowship, some madcap like himself who might suggest more unconventional emotions. Here again was a scientist ; it was, in fact, his old friend Rapp, now about to enjoy his hobby of microscopy. He was provided, for his sug-



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gestions, with a small toy instrument, such as is used by children with which to examine the scales of a moth's wing or the eyes of a house fly. It depressed the novice to see such opportunities wasted. He had no appetite for the dry topics of natural science; living, breathing human nature was his hobby, and he almost longed to put back to where Mr. Ruby sat in entranced reverie. Rapp's microscope was promised by the controller to magnify one million diameters, and a hidden world, a microcosm undreamed of, save by the discoverer of Fitz James O'Brien's "Diamond Lens," was Rapp's to explore. Diatoms were there of the size of ostrich eggs — animalculæ so minute that billions find roomy existence in a drop of water — the eyes of the enthusiast grew eager and powerful as wild panthers — he was, as he said, with a fine glow of pride, at the point of discovering the Ultimate Atom itself!

And Roulhac cared not a chew of pepsin gum for these delights. By this time he was sunk in an infinite disgust. It was, to him, but an extension of the same old game, as Ruby had said. If hypnotism could accomplish such marvels, why, to a man of imagination, could it not do more? He, in his time, would put it to the test and wring from its mysterious clutch some momentous stimulus.

Full of such hopes, he turned back to the office with the controller and seated himself on the divan. "Tell me," he demanded, "is there no man here with a soul above these petty games of art and science? Is Ruby the only man with human entrails in this organization? I scarcely know which is the greater fool: Dolittle, the dupe of an outlandish fairy tale; bah! I could turn mathematics topsy-turvy myself and get more out of it — I did it myself at school, and defied my teacher to prove that two and two



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were not five. Scientific Method? Speculation? My collar button has more speculation!— Or the old musician who would prefer a scientifically perfect rendering to all the vibrant emotions, faults, and failings of a wonderful human voice! He'd expurgate sharps and flats from the diapason! Is there no one, then, who has feeling, and great, red, fierce, brutal, passionate, primal emotions?"

Barowich drew himself up against the wall, tall, slender, dignified as the Emperor Wilhelm, with a light tawny moustache, too, bristling under his nose.

"Yes!" he cried. "I am one. The *joie de vivre* is in me! I Eat!"

"What do you mean?" said Roulhac.

"I eat, yes; eat, eat, *Eat!* Every night when they put me into my trance I Eat things. Take your soul and heart and mind and fill them with your little, petty, starveling emotions, if you will. Bless God, I have a Stomach! Do you know what is the life of a waiter? Every day to see people eating, eating, eating. Ye gods in heaven, and what swill, too! I know, for I live in a restaurant. I could tell secrets, tell of ragouts and stews and made-dishes! And the swine fill their faces with the garbage and tip me for the privilege. God, I earn my salary! I see them eating, eating, eating, when I go in the park, when I go to the theatre, when I smoke a cigar at home, I am haunted by the thought of them! Do you think I can eat, then, in that place, or anywhere but here? Have you ever sat at table while a newcomer began his dinner, after you were sated? Well, multiply that by a hundred, by two hundred, by a thousand! Raise it to the billionth power! It makes me sick, and it makes my sainted mother sick in heaven! I must keep up, I must satisfy hunger, but that is all. There is no pleas-



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ure. It is an operation, every meal, to me! But here, in my trance, I truly Eat. Such food! Fried octopus from Honolulu, the essence of wild oysters from the Gulf of California; I eat the Harwich whelk, live Japanese yellowfish, reindeer hide stewed in the Norwegian fashion, seal-blubber, and whales' tails, Congo locusts, and the juicy porcupine of South America. Have you tasted boiled mastodon? One gets such a chance hardly once in a lifetime! I have desserts and sweets prepared from receipts translated from Lucullus himself. My God, you should see me Eat!"

It was not Roulhac's practice to laugh aloud, but now his sleeves were full. The picture was abominably funny, and here, he thought, was the one member of the club who achieved sincere bliss. He arose and shook Barowich by the hand, saying nothing. The controller was touched by this tribute of silence, and, after a tear, turned to the desk. He was evidently preparing the *menu* for his next debauch.

Such was the Hypnotic Club. There were unsuccessful artists who painted shrieking canvases at night and swooned at sight of them next day, veterans like McArthur who rehearsed their old-time martial exploits, chess fiends who played interminable games, authors who wrote impossible essays, tradesmen who became emperors, and politicians who traveled over the whole globe with atlases and sought to spell a constituency in the planet Mars. One and all ministered to their private weakness and sought to ingrain folly, extending in dream the dominant foible till it grew into a monstrous obsession. Roulhac, scatterbrain as he was, in some way realized this, and he grew into a superb superiority. He would play with the players, but such games should not control him. He was for the outrageous ultimate—he would discover the New World of Folly.

Chapter Six

THE COUNTESS ROUGE

*What pushes are we wenchies driven to,
When fifteen once has found us!*

(Two Noble Kinsmen.)



BEFORE he had had time enough to formulate his revolt against the misapplied opportunities of the Hypnotic Club, before he had concocted any game sufficiently maniacal to inspire his enthusiasm, Roulhac Braghampton received inspiration from an unlooked-for source.

Meanwhile, he attended the daily séances and observed the methods of the several controllers. He took his hand, little by little, under the direction of authority, and succeeded easily in inducing the first stages of hypnosis, all that was required in the elementary experiments of the association. He read all the works upon mesmerism in the library, and, before long, he was thoroughly informed upon the science, down to the last details of modern development. He attempted experiments described in foreign scientific and medical papers, and carried many of them far beyond the point where his informant stopped. The field of post-hypnotic suggestion attracted him most, for here, he saw, the most wonderful results could be obtained. Now, this form of magnetism was forbidden by the by-laws of the club, and his excursions into this field of dream were





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attempted only with the greatest circumspection, so as not to arouse suspicion. He limited his suggestions to the opening of a watch at a certain hour, yawning, or the impelling of some banal remark. He stood in great danger, but he took the risk, for the trivial experiments of the club bored him.

Thus Roulhac's interest began to depend more upon his trials with others than upon his own amusement while under the influence of the controller. At those times he gave some unimportant suggestion, and spent his evenings in dreams of the theater, rehearsing some particularly well spiced incident of his past, or indulging his insatiable curiosity with regard to the denizens of the town.

"I passed a curious house on Pacific Avenue, today," he would say to the controller. "The architecture was conceived in the most horrid taste. Aborted columns, impossible brackets, and shocking finials sprawled over the façade, and the fret-saw and turning lathe had done their worst. The whole structure, over-ornamented and mis-proportioned, was so uneasily designed that the place seemed about to explode. I wish the whole front of this structure to be removed, so that I may see the occupants in their several rooms, like fish in an aquarium, or like those side-less houses we see set upon the melodramatic stage, where a snowstorm howls outside and the villain tortures the virtuous heroine within. I wish to observe the manners and customs of the inhabitants of this architectural nightmare. I would know what kind of persons are content to inhabit so atrocious a receptacle, and see what effect it has had upon their lives, their liberties, and their pursuit of happiness."

In this way Roulhac amused himself during the first



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week or so, but his comparatively aimless machinations were soon interrupted by a more definite attraction.

The memory of the Countess Rouge still survived, and he often apostrophized Miss Harmony, in his sitting-room, with the praises of the missing lady. "Until you wear a blue blouse with white spots, gold braid, and brass buttons," he said to her often enough, "I shall not be happy. You have her figure, her complexion, her hair; why not her shirt-waist? Some day you may, Gladdy, old girl, and then all these old-fashioned rags will go to the dump."

It must not, however, be imagined from this that Roulhac was unfaithful to the memory of the mysterious Kitty Carmine. He thought of her, at times, and there was room enough in his heart for both. He was glad, on the whole, remembering her strenuous capacity, that she had not written again, though he would have been delighted at the prospect of an interview. Roulhac had been spoiled. And besides, to tell the truth, he was not idle, he had other traps set, and these he attended to in the dreary interim while both Kitty and the Countess held themselves aloof. His correspondence kept him busy every morning at his table in the front window of the Peanut Shell, and there, while Roulhac scribbled, bit his pen, and cast, now and then, a nod at the mountain over the way, or a wink at a Pacific steamer promenading with officious pretense through the passage of the Golden Gate, the Lincoln ogrillon over the mantel found sufficient excuse for its cynical plaster sneer, contemplating this sedentary clerk casting his epistolary boomerangs.

He was discovered thus, one day, as we have discovered him before, by three feet of messenger boy and cigarette, who had leisurely but surely carried the hill, after a lively



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skirmish with the gang of Jones Street juveniles. The A. D. T. Kid, as he had earned the right to be called, had not, however, exhausted his ammunition. There remained still a tongueful of slang, which he handed out when Roulhac opened the door to the infant terror.

"Say, is youse de Walkin' Peanut?" inquired the prodigy.

"You get onto yourself," Roulhac cheerfully observed, "or I'll make you look like the northeast corner of a Hamburg steak after the dachshund has got through with it!"

The A. D. T. Kid looked pleased to have met, at last, a gentleman of intelligence. "Say," he said, "youse all right, all right. Youse one of Nature's aldermen, for fair! I t'ought youse run wid de tall-talk push, but I guess yer know de American langwidge down to de rubber heels."

"If you've got anything for me, hand it out, young Shakespeare," said Roulhac, "then go and talk fog and tourists to Mount Tamalpais, if your mouth needs exercise!"

"Gee! I never t'ought I'd get up against de real t'ing on top of dis mountain," the messenger went on. "Youse ought to call dis street de Roo de Ashbarrel. De sidewalks is a part of de view, up here, ain't dey? Here's yer bill. Sign here, on de same colyum as where it's wrote. See?" And a dirty finger traveled along the blue line in his receipt book.

"Where did this letter come from?" Roulhac asked, before opening the envelope.

"You'll find de alias inside," opined the Kid. "It was give me by a peacheroooino on Pine Street. Say, youse got a dead good graft, dere,—I'm next after youse. Youse just lights 'em an' trows 'em away, don't yer?"

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"Never mind the lady ; you 've got nerve enough to try to make Saint Peter jump through the hoop. Chase yourself, now !"

"Oh, youse can't side-step me," the youngster said, jauntily. "I shakes every tree an' I play notin' but blue chips ! De A. D. T. Kid seldom gets truncated. Youse ain't got a smoke, now, have yer ?"

Roulhac indulgently handed him a large cigar, which his guest looked at knowingly. "Tree parts body-Brussels an' one part rubber boot," he said to himself. "So long ! Don't take no Patagonian currency till I see youse again !"

The two, mutually refreshed by the picturesque colloquy, separated, one to run the gauntlet at the bottom of the hill, and the other to light a pipe and throw himself upon the pink couch to read his note, as an epicure should, in leisure and comfort.

He was disappointed to find the letter consisting of but five words. "Come at once. Kitty Carmine." It was dated and contained the address of a fashionable apartment house on Pine Street.

Luckily, Roulhac was shaved, and to tumble into morning coat, ribbed trousers, and fawn-colored waistcoat took him little time. A silk hat, worn usually only by politicians and undertakers in San Francisco, and English lead-colored gloves made him a mark for the depraved insurgents waiting below, but he risked the notoriety. As he stumbled down the wooden steps of the rotting sidewalk, he saw the A. D. T. Kid engaged in the noble art of self-defense, easily opposing tongue and fist to the pusillanimous assaults of a horde of thin-blooded vagrants at the corner grocery. This diversion saved the Braghampton hat, and he escaped easily in the direction of the Hyde Street grip.



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Arrived at the house on Pine Street, a boy in buttons answered the bell, and, taking Roulhac's card, left him, for a time, in a high and somber hall, decorated in blue and orange. Here the young man spent his time in front of a long mirror, criticising his costume, till a voice called him, and he was beckoned up by the boy on the stairs and piloted through several halls and passages, round many right angles, into a small room. Pinned to the outside of the door was a torn envelope, bearing the penciled legend: "In Miss Wilder's room. Back in ten minutes."

Here, for a while longer, Roulhac was left to contemplate, in some surprise, a confusion of newspapers, photographs, and various minor articles of a lady's wardrobe, till, with a sibilance of silken skirts, a young lady swept into the room with a careless stride.

It was the Countess Rouge!

She was whistling cheerfully, and her hands were knotting the scarf under her white linen collar, when her eyes first encountered the young man. She stared at him point blank for a second, then, before he had a chance to speak, she seized his hand and ran him swiftly down the hallway, dodging one corner after another, skiving the furniture on the way, and propelled him, finally, into a large bare room filled with windows. Here she pointed to a chair and, laughing as if her heart would break, disappeared to complete her toilet.

Roulhac, mystified by the whole proceeding and the haste of their flight, dazed with its sudden revelation, sat gagged with emotion. The discovery that Kitty Carmine and the Countess Rouge were the same, though the suspicion has not, it is likely, escaped the avid reader, came upon him with unexpected delight. Like the dazzling





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burst of a Roman candle, many sorry memories exploded in his mind.

He looked about him to gain some hint of explanation from the chamber in which he now found himself, but it was barren of suggestion. The ceiling was lofty, out of all proportion to the plan of the apartment. Upon the vast wall-space a little sketch or two was pinned, islands in the universal sea of brown tint. A folding bed bedizened with a plate glass mirror, a sofa, and two chairs shared his loneliness; naked poles of vanished portières hung at the several doors. Upon the glaring white marble mantel were huddled a few pictures in gilt frames. Four lighted gas jets in the central chandelier mingled with the sunlight. At an open window the north wind tugged snappishly at a half-raised shade. The carpet was a wild green, tangled with a restless, intricate pattern, repeating itself laboriously over the waste of floor.

He walked to the window to curb the restless shade, and looked out. Below him the city fell towards Market Street in a jumble of flat roofs, pierced by the spires of churches. Here the twin minarets of the synagogue rose in Oriental curves and bulbs, and farther away the few tall buildings occupied by the newspaper offices rose like towers over a two-story landscape. Nearer, on Hyde Street, the cable cars came and went, patrolling a scenic railway over the tops of hills, down into wooden valleys, round sharp curves and up steep grades, over a track unequalled for outlook in the whole world—the conductor picking his teeth, unconscious of his gorgeous fortune. But of a sudden, directly below him, the front door banged and a man hurried down the steps to board a passing car.

In Roulhac's mind a turmoil of suspicion hissed and



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frothed. The figure was strangely like—and yet, it was impossible—at this hour of the day, too! It was eleven o'clock. Could it be? It was, it was not, it might be,—would it be? could it be? should it be? Was it? Was it not? And why and how? No, it was not! Yes, it was—Barowitch, the waiter!

The Countess Rouge laid a jeweled finger upon his shoulder.

“Now the stage is set,” she said, “shall we ring up the curtain?”

“Who in Heaven’s name are you?” Roulhac demanded, turning to her. “How many names have you?”

“As many as I have costumes,” she replied. “Just at present, I am Miss Cicely Fex. In the blue and gold blouse, the Countess Rouge, at your service. In bottle-green velvet, you may call me Lady Méchante. Oh, I don’t spare the list of names in the back of the dictionary! As soon as I hear a new one that I like, off I go to my dressmaker’s or my tailor’s, and order an appropriate suit. The Christian name or title goes always with the same waist, and the surname with the skirt; so, if I had the bad taste to wear a blue blouse with this, I should be forced to call myself the Countess Fex. In the same way I might tomorrow be Lady Rouge or Cicely Méchante. It is a simple problem in Permutation and Combination.”

“But sometimes—pardon me—you must be under the necessity of wearing no gown. In your *robe de nuit*, now, for instance, who are you then?”

“When I reveal one, I shall reveal the other,” Miss Fex replied. “At present the question borders on familiarity.” Unable to resist the temptation, she added: “And Familiarity breeds Attempt!”



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“Kitty Carmine, then ; who is she ?” Roulhac pursued.

“Ah, that was because I happened to wear a red cloak to the Matrimonial Exchange,” said the Countess, for it was this title Roulhac chose to adopt. “You would not care to know her. No style.”

Whether or not Miss Carmine had style, the present incumbent of that vivacious personality possessed it to a degree that did Roulhac’s heart good. He regarded her with admiration. His mind went to her advertisement where, as No. 2465, she had stated her charms and requirements. “Surely,” he said, “you cannot find it hard ‘to be adored.’ Why need you advertize in a Matrimonial Exchange to secure that ?”

“Cheap compliment debarred,” said the Countess. “Adoration, you must know, is a lost art. Instead, we have the modern flirtation, which is, I am informed, strictly American ; a half-way between friendship and love, in which the ghost of passion coquettes with the wraith of comradeship ; where each tries to get as much as he can and to give as little ; which has a sickly sensuality and a morbid vanity for its progenitors and is the most immoral and degenerate underminer of character that ever cursed a people !”

She spoke soberly ; but, this turgid declamation over, her head tilted and out of her mouth bubbled the most delicious fountain of laughter. Then she brought down her eyes from the ceiling and leveled them at her companion. “There’s enough for your catechism. It’s my turn now. What is your name ? Is it really such excess baggage as you pretend ? Roulhac Braghampton, indeed ! What penny-dreadful did you emerge from ?”

The young man almost blushed at his lack of invention. Then he said, “I have been called the ‘Walking Peanut.’”



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Such is the fame conferred by a residence on Russian Hill."

The Countess shrieked at this. "Walking Peanut!! I must go up and live on Vallejo Street," she cried. "They may call me an Upright Egg! There's no knowing what inspiration I might have there. But fancy attempting to provide a costume for such a *sobriquet*!"

Roulhac furtively scanned his coat and felt of his necktie. Was he, then, appropriately clad? "Why did n't you answer my letters?" he asked, appealing now to Kitty Carmine.

The Countess smiled. Indeed, she had smiled before, but this expression had more meaning. "I found out all I wished to know," she admitted. "You proved to be the one I was looking for, and, once sure of you, I preferred to wait till a few further preparations were completed."

"Indeed," said Roulhac, somewhat haughtily. "Are you so sure of me?"

"I am as sure of you as you appear to be sure of yourself!"

This remark baffled the young man, but, to be on the safe side, he decided to regard it as a compliment. "Now what are you going to do with me? What's the little game?"

"Game?" she replied, "everything is a game. Is n't it game enough for us two to be sitting here, in this naked room, two strangers trying to get acquainted? Every word you say is a revelation. It is too exciting to stand, almost! What do I know about you? Here we are, to all intents and purposes alone in the whole world! At any moment you may strip off your conventional disguise as a Walking Peanut and confront me with a glimpse of your character in the nude. You may draw a dagger on me, or you may



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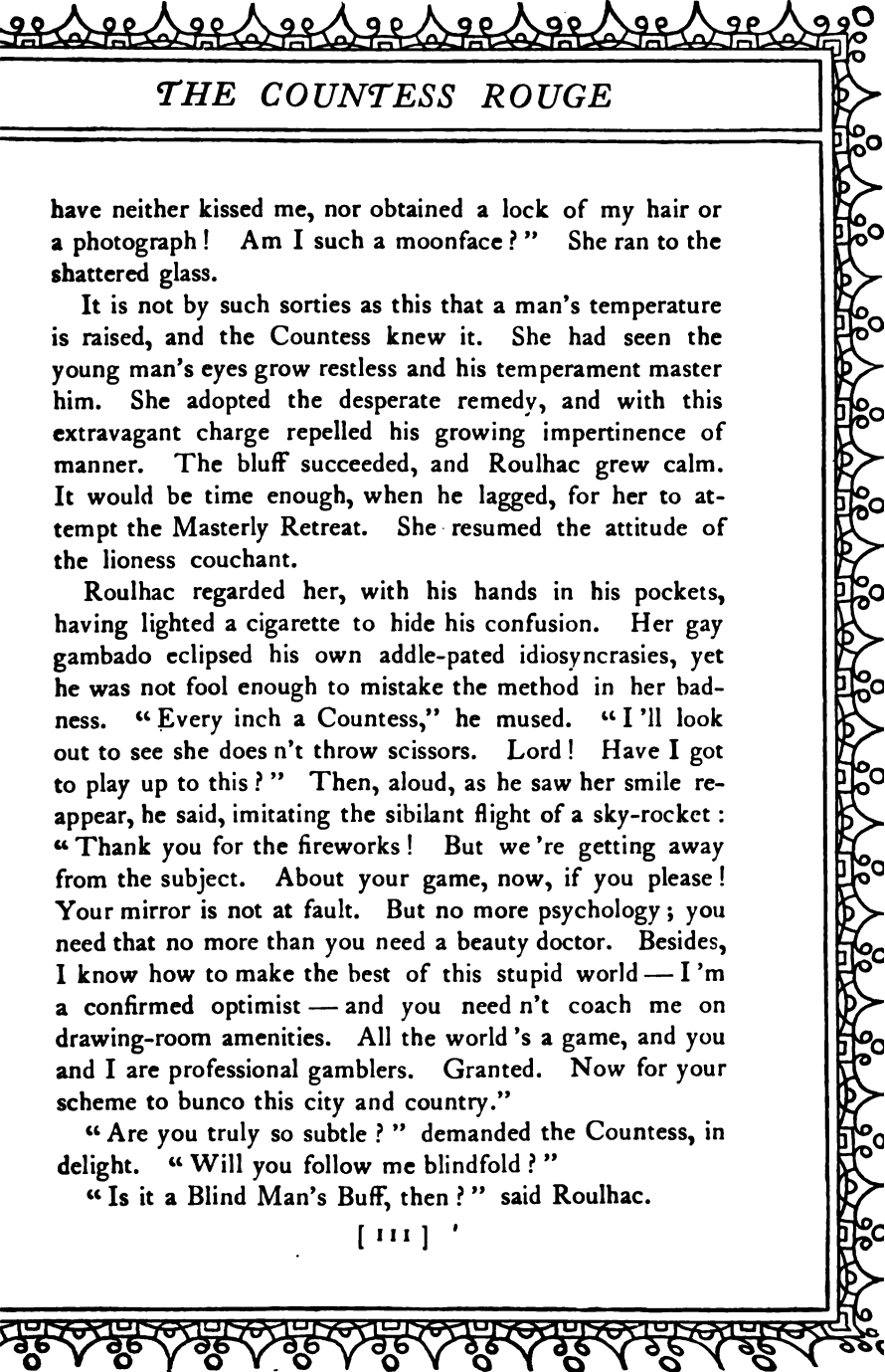
murder me with some compromising remark. You may say 'cosy' or 'chat,' or you may shoot some vulgarism such as 'proposition' or 'party' or 'balance' that will slay my sensibilities like a bullet! Game! I tell you there is nothing so exciting in the whole world 'as a first interview with one who assays over eighty-five per cent in the mint of Mentality!"

As Roulhac's head went round, he remembered saying, "But it is not the first time, is it? There was that day at Campi's."

"That was but my reconnoissance," protested the Countess. "This skirmish is where I must unmask your batteries and feel your defense. But, seriously," she went on, "I have my idea. I embraced the opportunities provided by the Matrimonial Exchange to gain access to men whom I might never have been able to meet. I tried them all, and you were the only one qualified to become my accomplice. You have humor, tact, and resource, I believe. Now, if you care to follow such a will-o'-the-wisp as I, I can propose a stupendous piece of folly, well worth the while of the man who pulled down the Cogswell Statue. I like you!"

"Ah, you are an American girl, after all!" said Roulhac. "You will soon be making love to me."

"Slowpoke!" cried the Countess, in a rage. Then flinging a small chair into the mirror with a furious gesture, she returned to her place. "Pardon my temper, but you exasperate me," she said. "I must play my part, and act up to my title, for we aristocrats have become too lenient with our duties. Is this your idea of a first call? Why," and she pulled out a little watch encrusted with rubies, "here you have been in my presence ten minutes and you



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have neither kissed me, nor obtained a lock of my hair or a photograph! Am I such a moonface?" She ran to the shattered glass.

It is not by such sorties as this that a man's temperature is raised, and the Countess knew it. She had seen the young man's eyes grow restless and his temperament master him. She adopted the desperate remedy, and with this extravagant charge repelled his growing impertinence of manner. The bluff succeeded, and Roulhac grew calm. It would be time enough, when he lagged, for her to attempt the Masterly Retreat. She resumed the attitude of the lioness couchant.

Roulhac regarded her, with his hands in his pockets, having lighted a cigarette to hide his confusion. Her gay gambado eclipsed his own addle-pated idiosyncrasies, yet he was not fool enough to mistake the method in her badness. "Every inch a Countess," he mused. "I'll look out to see she does n't throw scissors. Lord! Have I got to play up to this?" Then, aloud, as he saw her smile reappear, he said, imitating the sibilant flight of a sky-rocket: "Thank you for the fireworks! But we're getting away from the subject. About your game, now, if you please! Your mirror is not at fault. But no more psychology; you need that no more than you need a beauty doctor. Besides, I know how to make the best of this stupid world—I'm a confirmed optimist—and you need n't coach me on drawing-room amenities. All the world's a game, and you and I are professional gamblers. Granted. Now for your scheme to bunco this city and country."

"Are you truly so subtle?" demanded the Countess, in delight. "Will you follow me blindfold?"

"Is it a Blind Man's Buff, then?" said Roulhac.



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“There’s a Niagara of energy going to waste in this town,” the Countess went on. “This I want to divert, that it may divert us. Now, you are the one to help me, if you have the deplorable inconsequence of purpose that I have diagnosed. In a word, you are a member of the Hypnotic Club.”

“You know that, too!” ejaculated Roulhac. “What secret influence connects you with that society? Your look conjures up many suspicions. I seem to have seen you before, besides that strange appearance at Campi’s.”

“First, let me ask your opinion of the club and its management,” she wheedled.

Moved by a singular confidence, Roulhac poured out his contempt for the inadequacy of the association. He narrated the childish methods the members adopted to provide an evening’s entertainment, and, growing bolder, he confessed his own experiments with his fellow-members. The Countess aided his breast-cleaning with many nods of encouragement.

“I thought the evidence of your fifty letters could not deceive me,” she said. “But I don’t see why you have not discovered the handle with which to brandish this instrument. Now let me explain, in my turn, for I am sure I can trust you.”

She went on, then, with her own experience, explaining many of the circumstances that had perplexed him. She had become acquainted with the possibilities of the Hypnotic Club through her acquaintance with Barowich, whose post-prandial indiscretions had put her in possession of all the secrets of the association.

Fascinating his conceit with many quiet conversations at Campi’s after the lunchers had left that establishment quiet



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for their *tête-à-tête*, the Countess Rouge had obtained a supremacy over the waiter sufficient to ensure her a large interest in the private history of the club. She had even allowed him to call at her Pine Street rooms and had practiced upon him the art of mesmerism, in order, through him, to gain sway over the other members. She had compelled him to give to the members many post-hypnotic suggestions that he himself was made to forget, and in this way, to test her power, she had conceived the idea of compelling Professor Dolittle to rise and speak that Friday noon when Roulhac was present. She had reserved the power to awaken the Professor from that specially induced trance, and had calmed him with the proper words.

In order to observe the workings of the club to better advantage, she had taken rooms at No. 1 Key Court; she had witnessed Roulhac's part in the scene with Colonel McArthur, and, seeing his name upon the card given to Mr. Rapp, she had identified him with the versatile correspondent of the Matrimonial Exchange. Thus provided with a skillful accomplice, it remained necessary only to dispose of Barowich, and in this she had been interrupted by the hall boy's stupidity in showing her guest up to her private apartment, where Barowich himself had barely escaped seeing the newcomer.

"And now," she concluded, "to work! There is much to be done. We are to entertain, not only ourselves, but a city! Inch by inch we must obtain control of the club, we must enlarge the field of post-hypnotic suggestion till we have the members thoroughly under our influence, we must start branch organizations, and bring them into the attraction of the magnet we hold. Are you mad enough,



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glad enough, bad enough for this? We shall be monarchs of Dreamland!"

Roulhac, Walking Peanut though he was, embraced her with rapture. The mirror had not been smashed for nothing!

Chapter Seven

THE LEAGUE OF DREAMS

These are the pranks and friskins of her madness.

(Two Noble Kinsmen.)



TO obtain a supremacy in the Hypnotic Club, and bring all the members under his direct control, was now Roulhac's set purpose, and, aided by the fertile suggestions of the Countess Rouge, this proved to be no very difficult affair. By skillful manipulation he arranged, first, that his evening as controller came round oftener than the rotative scheme provided. The officer of the night was prevented from appearing by means of false telegrams, to accomplish which the A. D. T. Kid was suborned. Others found themselves, at his suggestion, indisposed to attempt the labor of hypnotizing the members, and so, by means of a hint here and a word there, an introduction to his fascinating copartner, the liberal use of cigars, and many other wiles and ruses, Mr. Roulhac Braghampton became the popular and trusted center about which the club revolved.

This, however, was not accomplished without incurring the enmity of the head waiter at Campi's. His questions were often embarrassing, and his curiosity hard to divert. A streak of misfortune coming to Barowich at about this time, however, played into Roulhac's hand, and the loan of




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a considerable sum of money bribed the man for a while to abstain from any open revolt. It was evident, nevertheless, that he was biding his time, a snake coiled in the grass, and that he hoped to take advantage later of the influence Roulhac had attained.

The club once well in hand, the two conspirators experimented tentatively with the tool at their disposal. While Roulhac had essayed only such simple suggestions as the passing of an absurd remark, this had been easy. It was not extraordinary, in that city, for a man to burst out with the statement that the climate of California was canned in Paradise and sent to the Pacific Coast for the especial delectation of the Native Sons of the Golden West, or that the present season was exceptional, it having not been so hot or so cold, so wet or so dry, as the case might be, since '49. In that land every citizen is a self-constituted real-estate agent, and feels it his duty to boom the country. It was even declared, by Roulhac's victims, that Market Street was the finest boulevard in the world, and that the City Hall compared favorably with the capitols of most European cities. But he now essayed a more dangerous game. The Countess Rouge was at his elbow, and such innocuous pleasantry was not sufficiently exciting for her ravenous appetite for sensation. It was her aim to Londonize San Francisco, to plant the seeds of culture, refinement, and convention, to raise the wooden village, in short, and that as suddenly as possible, to the rank of a modern city.

It was not long, then, before the town was shocked with the eccentric behavior of the Hypnotic Club. The members, incited by the alluring insinuations of the giddy Countess, began to prate of Nietzsche, Stephen Phillips, and Conrad, instead of Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Ambrose





THE LEAGUE OF DREAMS

Bierce. One heard of "Les Fauves," of De Bussy, of Bahiism, of Feminism and Marcelle Tinayre. The latest cry in Kensington—"The Souls," or Sociological Romance—flew to No. 7 Key Court and there found nourishing lodgment. Silk hats and frock-coats were seen on Kearny Street of a weekday forenoon, and warehouses began to be opened at nine A. M. Merchants, live merchants, had tea and toast brought in at four o'clock for their office boys, and hosiers made fortunes in lead-colored gloves.

From this, the next step was easy. The members were sent as emissaries into various quarters of the town, and soon, with this original organization as a nucleus, lodges were invested all over San Francisco. In the Mission there was a congregation of mechanics. In Tar Flat the hoodlums combined under the banner of the league. Aristocrats from the Western Addition flocked to the club-rooms. The Barbary Coast emptied its dance halls, and on Rincon Hill the oldest residents bore them company. In Chinatown there were lodges of coolies, laundrymen, and shopkeepers. In Butchertown the cattlemen fought for admittance. The craze for hypnotism spread down the San Bruno Road as far as the eye could reach. Nob Hill was infected with millionaires and railway magnates well under the spell. In the Latin Quarter the seed grew, and along the Water Front the branch organizations were alive with sleepy stevedores and fishermen. Across the Bay, Oakland and Alameda and Berkeley came into line, and in Sausalito and Belvedere the English residents and cottagers pledged their faith.

Thus, like a mighty pestilence, grew the League of Dreams. From one to another lodge Roulhac and the

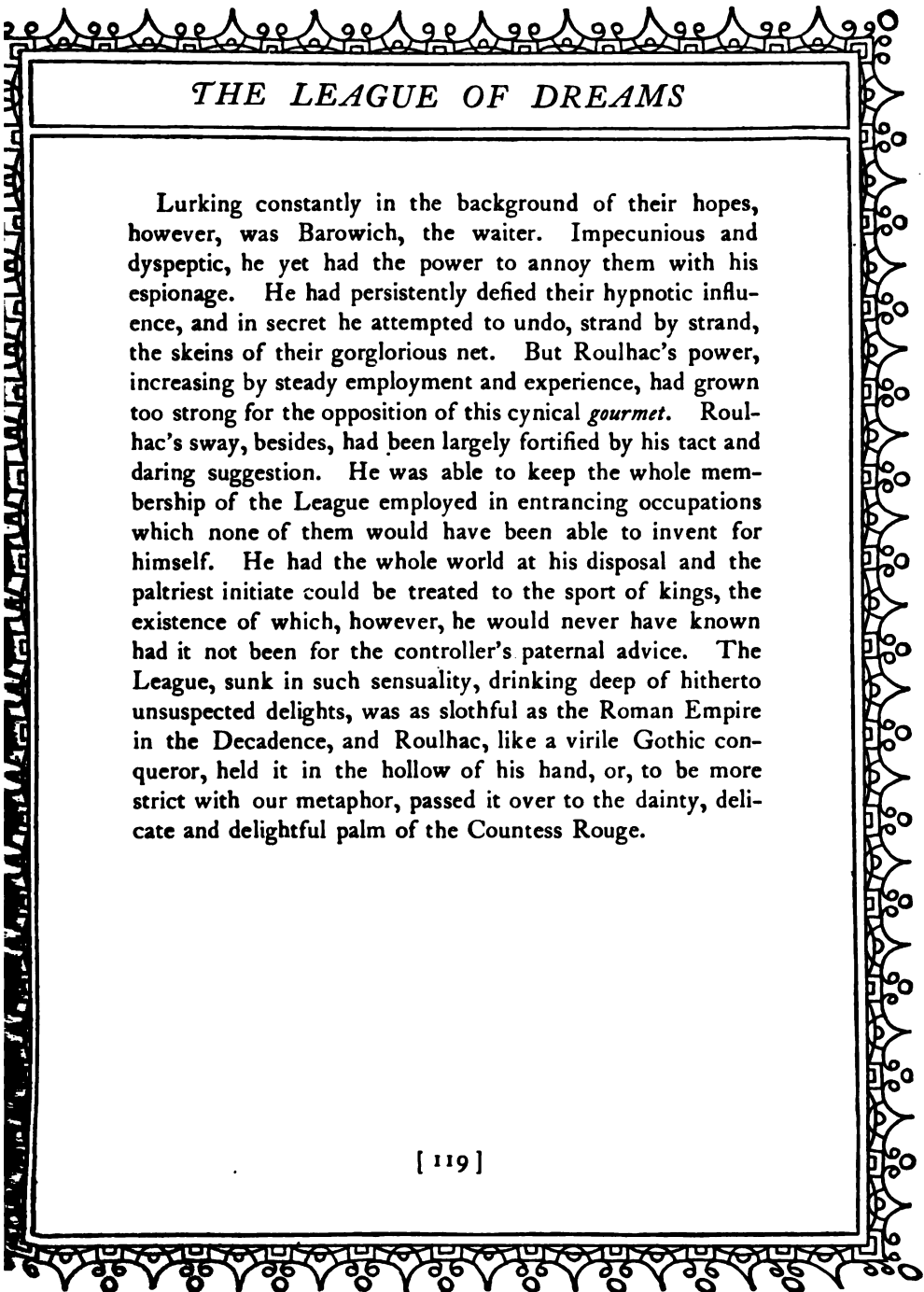


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Countess Rouge flew, weaving the meshes of the great conspiracy. Slowly but surely, with irresistible cunning, they bound their followers head and foot in their toils, till each branch was well in hand. This task was completed with the training of some intelligent subordinate controller, who proceeded along the lines that Roulhac had himself appointed.

There came a day, at last, when each lieutenant had announced that his supremacy over the affairs of the lodge to which he belonged was welded firm. It now remained only to bind these petty tyrants and lead all the wires into the hands of the mischievous pair. By early spring the herculean task was accomplished and Countess Rouge made ready for the master-stroke.

By this time, in and about the city of San Francisco, there had been established some fifty lodges of the League of Dreams. The membership of each stood at nearly twenty; there were, therefore, at least a thousand men under the influence of the twin rulers of this secret fraternity. Each lodge had been put through its paces and extraordinary trials had merited the confidence of Roulhac and his irresponsible partner. On Nob Hill wealthy and influential but private-spirited citizens had presented the city with valuable gifts of real estate. Chinamen had discarded cues, butchers had started Tolstoi clubs, Italian fishermen had joined the Prohibition party, Oakland residents had instituted an all-night ferry; but the end was not yet. The Countess had tired of utilitarian tests; reform bored the Walking Peanut. The world was too dull and colorless, they both agreed. Both were, at heart, merry-makers, and nothing but a jest in wild Rococo or Baroque would satisfy them.



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Lurking constantly in the background of their hopes, however, was Barowich, the waiter. Impecunious and dyspeptic, he yet had the power to annoy them with his espionage. He had persistently defied their hypnotic influence, and in secret he attempted to undo, strand by strand, the skeins of their gorglorious net. But Roulhac's power, increasing by steady employment and experience, had grown too strong for the opposition of this cynical *gourmet*. Roulhac's sway, besides, had been largely fortified by his tact and daring suggestion. He was able to keep the whole membership of the League employed in entrancing occupations which none of them would have been able to invent for himself. He had the whole world at his disposal and the paltriest initiate could be treated to the sport of kings, the existence of which, however, he would never have known had it not been for the controller's paternal advice. The League, sunk in such sensuality, drinking deep of hitherto unsuspected delights, was as slothful as the Roman Empire in the Decadence, and Roulhac, like a virile Gothic conqueror, held it in the hollow of his hand, or, to be more strict with our metaphor, passed it over to the dainty, delicate and delightful palm of the Countess Rouge.

Chapter Eight

THE PREHISTORIC PARADE

*No woman-keeper i' the world,
Though she had practiced seven year at the pest-house,
Could have done 't quaintlier.*

(The White Devil.)



It was May in California! The rains were over and the sodden hills, changing from brown to vivid green, bloomed with wild flowers. The spring came galloping up from the south in triumph, scattering violets and poppies, trillium and buttercups widecast, and the skies, leaden before, were frescoed in living blue. The meadow-lark was heard in the open and the odor of early roses came up on the breeze. It was May in California!

Constant association with the debonair Countess had weakened Roulhac's heart, and any violent shock now would be likely to bring about a serious affection. If he knew it, he did not care, and, hand in hand with her, he danced through their frolic farce, watching for her smile, more and more swayed by her dominant personality. What depths in her heart were touched he did not know. There were so many frivolous waves upon the surface of her emotions one could never judge of the currents below. It is not only still waters that run deep. She distracted him, however, whenever he would be serious, and, even in their quieter moments, she seemed on her guard. This much



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only he knew of her past : that she was English, that she had been married to one Leopold Gaillarde, and that, after his death, she had achieved a sensational career in London. Roulhac was of the opinion that, in a previous incarnation, the pseudo Countess had been a pin-wheel. She combined in her character and action the brilliancy, the fire, and the apparently useless and fitful energy of that humble pyro-technical engine. When she died, Roulhac thought with a smile, her soul would pass into an automobile. She was one to give one a run for one's money, was Florizelle Gaillarde, *alias* Lady Méchante, *alias* the Countess Rouge, *alias* Kitty Carmine, *alias* Cicely Fex, *alias et alia*.

She was congenial, however, and amenable to his ways ; complaisant beyond the strict limits of conventional decorum. She came, occasionally, to his rooms in the Peanut Shell, and there they had often a snug and easy lunch, a matter of underdone steaks, broiled oysters deftly spitted on hat pins, Welsh rabbit stewed in a tin pie plate at Roulhac's open fire, or an egg or two stuffed by the Countess's fair hands, the corpulent strawberries of the season, and a *bon mot* or two for condiment to flavor companionship, withal, and always a kiss or three for dessert. It was at such a quiet hour that the climax was brought about. Roulhac was dangerously near to a proposal, and the Countess feared him.

"We are now at the acme of success," the Countess began. "We are the gods in the machine ; it is time for us to enter and give a sharp change to all this routine. We have tried didactic suggestion, and I confess I am wearied of that pursuit. There are too many reformers in the world already." Here she lighted a cigarette. "Philanthropy is death to Romance. I suspect even you, sometimes, of

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being inclined in that direction. No doubt you'd pull down this ramshackle little cottage and put up an 'Artistic Home,' if I'd give my consent. But see, now, how deliriously all the doors stand ajar. There is not a right angle in the house!"

"What do you propose, then?" said Roulhac. "I deny the accusation. I am no fonder of the level and perpendicular standards than you. Have n't we had our fun with the League of Dreams? What more can we do? I see the necessity, but who was the father of Invention? I'll stand for anything!"

"If I believed that," said the Countess, dreamily.

"I swear it!" cried her adorer. "Turn San Francisco upside down and I'll help you push!"

"Tell me, then," she said, with a strange light in her blue eyes, "do you wear night-shirts?"

"Never!" cried the young man. "Pajamas have I worn since I slept in red flannels."

"I was once married to a man who wore night-shirts," pursued the erratic lady, "and, though I saw them seldom, I always hailed their appearance with infinite glee!"

"Why with glee, and why did you see them seldom?" Roulhac allowed himself to inquire.

"Seldom, because my husband, dear old Leopold, was a burglar; he was not often at home nights, except on Sundays and bank holidays. And with glee, because, saving the domestic hen, there is nothing so ridiculous under Heaven as a man in a night-shirt. That long, stiff, starched jet white straight-sided garment will be the death of me yet! Give me a man in a night-shirt to contemplate, and you may pull out all my teeth and I shall never notice it! It is the sublimest creation of masculine attire.



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All your cylindrical clothes are, to the artist, laughable, but the night-shirt eclipses folly. Jupiter in a night-shirt would lose his godhead. No wonder no man is a hero to his valet, if he wears an object like that!"

Roulhac felt himself borne along on this wave of enthusiasm, and in his mind's eye the diverting pantomime glowed. He saw Colonel McArthur, with his wad of sponge-colored hair, in a night-shirt. There was no possible doubt that he wore them. He was a gentleman of the old school. He saw Rapp thus clad, and Professor Dolittle in a waving robe of white linen, with three buttons down the front. Ruby, too, — Ruby, the beau, in this absurd attire, scaring away Cupid. He mentioned his vision to the Countess, and, infected by this madness, the two gasped with hysteria.

The Countess went on. "If one man in a night-shirt is so ridiculous, then what under Heaven would be the spectacle of ten, of a hundred?" She arose and waxed theatrical. "A THOUSAND MEN IN NIGHT-SHIRTS!!! Eureka!" she screamed, and went off into a new paroxysm.

In a half-hour they had calmed, and exiled Reason stalked through the door to handshake Madness. Meanwhile the two had cut and dried their ways and means. The hideous plot was hatched and brooded in their minds. The Supreme Adventure began to take shape.

A week sufficed for preparation. This was the programme: a general convention of the League was to be called, and during its session the heads of lodges were to be gathered and instructed in the details of this monstrous jest.

Roulhac's work had been done too well not to succeed. Every order was strictly obeyed. The clans gathered, and



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the whole membership was mustered in Golden Gate Hall for speeches and feed. Speeches and feed, feed and speeches, held them spellbound while the lieutenants were hypnotized and the last hideous suggestions injected into their sodden brains. The membership at large was in turn inoculated, until the league as a whole was primed for the public display. The procession was ordered to assemble at Key Court, and to proceed down Geary Street preceded by a band of martial music.

On the festal night the Countess Rouge, in her blue dotted blouse, took her place with Roulhac Braghampton in the windows of a rented room in the third floor of the Lick House. Spick and span was the dainty widow, her red hair glowing underneath a Russian toque, her eyes burning with expectation. The Walking Peanut beside her sent many a fervent glance in her direction, and his fingers, clasped in hers, tightened as the dimple went and came in her smooth pink cheek. They sat like two children awaiting a circus parade — eager, fearful, curious.

Then, from afar, the strains of a brass band floated down to them in a slow *crescendo*, first in the steady punctuation of the bass drum, then the scream of the cornets, finally throbbing with the thumping accompaniment of the pumping trombones. Then, with a great bursting wave of harmony, the head of the procession swung round the corner and turned into Montgomery Street, and swept towards them. The crowd, keen for a new sensation, halted on the curb, or rushed up to meet the advancing throng. The show was a surprise to the town, and, here and there, policemen hurried to the center of interest, making impromptu preparations for the moving procession. Now the band,



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bursting in the throes of a bombastic march, was underneath the windows of the Lick House, and the first ranks of the League of Dreams tramped heavily across Post Street, a burly stevedore at the head bearing the banner of the Barbary Coast Lodge No. 37. A broad passage was opened for them; the street cars were halted, and, from the *Wave* office, across the street, a faint scattering cheer rose like a cluster of pink balloons.

The Countess's clasp on Roulhac's hand had grown tighter at sight of the lines of men. Now she rose with a fire in her eye, her lips half open, her small fists clenched. She leaned far out over the sill, shooting an entrancing look at the procession, which had now filled the street. Suddenly, in a piercing voice she cried to the mob below :

“*Halt!*”

The parade stopped, instantly paralyzed at the sound of her command. A triple row of turned-up faces whitened the street below. Nothing stirred, till, fighting his way through the press, his eyes rolling with passion, his lips churning a foam of froth, his arms waving a fierce protest, screaming commands to the galvanized figures that packed the street, his hat off, his collar loose, Barowich, the waiter, boiling with Slavonic fury, now a raving madman, appeared below. “*Wake up, wake up!*” he howled. “*Wake up and don't mind her!*” He was seized by an immense Irish policeman and held in an iron grip.

Then again the shrill voice of the Countess Rouge rang out like a bugle call :

“*READY, — NOW!!!*”

There was a prolonged wriggle all along the line, incomprehensible to the dazed minds of the inquisitive onlookers. A thousand hats were thrown off, and silk topper, derby,

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straw, and pugaree were strewn upon the asphalt. Then, two thousand arms writhed in the air and a thousand coats—frock, sack, and cutaway, blouse, jacket, and jumper—carpeted the street. With one prolonged convulsive squirm, as if some monstrous serpent were shedding its skin, the trousers of the whole League came off, vests were discarded, and, standing stiff as a human Stonehenge, an army in white linen uniform, naked of shin and hoof, the League of Dreams stood assembled in its night-shirt, quivering wretchedly in the evening chill. Up and down the street the procession was stalled like a snow-drift. Dago fishermen and negro barber, millionaire and contractor, scavengers and bankers, all equal now, all reduced to the lowest terms, the Greatest Common Denominator being, for that historic hour, a bleached night-shirt. As they stood there, transfixed, rich and poor in one common condition, their equality was that bestowed by Death alone. Along the sidewalks the vast crowd brooded, too overcome by the display to move. Mothers clutched their little children in their arms and turned away their eyes. Strong men held their strong breaths and dared not speak. Careless youths chewed tobacco to pulp, wondering if such things might be. The police, who had at first made frenzied attempts to stop the general disrobing, sheathed their clubs and glared, abandoning the futile attempt at interference with the tableau.

Above, in the third story of the Lick House, the Countess could hardly control herself. Her beauteous bosom heaved. The strident excitement of the moment all but prostrated her. But, before the mass beneath had begun to move, she cried out again into the street her magic command :



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“SLEEP!”

With that, a thousand inanimate forms fell before the eyes of the ever-increasing throng; and, falling, did not rise again. There in the paved street they lay in windrows, like corpses after some mighty battle, piled in lines, their shirt-tails fluttering, their bare feet projecting with meaningless gestures, a thousand men asleep in the public highway, a thousand men in night-shirts blocking the traffic of Montgomery Street, a thousand noses snoring in unison under the spitting violet rays of the cold, calm electric arcs, a thousand breasts rising and falling in abandoned inspiration.

It was not till the rout fell that the Countess's emotion, rising to fever pitch, threatened her reason. Her face went white, her smile frozen upon her lips. She sank back into the room and clung to her partner with her eyeballs staring, her face convulsed with an expression of agony.

“Roulhac! Roulhac!” she shrieked, “save me! If I laugh, I shall die! My mind will give way — if I let myself laugh once, I shall roll in convulsions! Oh, oh, *oh!* Roulhac, if you love me, save me from laughing. Don't let me look at them!”

Years hence, perhaps, the Countess may safely recall that sight. Now heroic measures were necessary to prevent collapse. He sought for a counter-irritant, slapped her sharply upon the face and hands, swore a punctilious oath at her, and hurried her down the back stairway into a rear courtyard, and thence into Sutter Street, where, hailing a cab, he drove with haste towards her rooms. He did not allow her to look back, lest, like Lot's wife, some terrible visitation should paralyze her; but as he bespoke the driver he saw, in the end of his eye, the patrol wagons and fire



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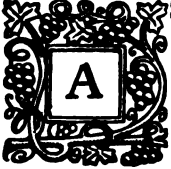
companies dashing down the street, and a detachment of police loading the bodies upon a dray at the corner, covering them with a heterogeneous mass of clothing. An eager crowd was collecting stray watches and purses along the pavement.

Chapter Nine

REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM

That I could shoot mine eyes at him, like gun-stones!

(Volpone; or, The Fox.)

S Roulhac tottered to his room that night, he felt that the last act of a sublime farce had been played out; what, then, was to follow? Little gushes of regret, remorse, and even of fear broke in his heart and a premonition of coming evil smote him. Then, with a swift intuition, the vision of the thousand outraged men that would soon be on his trail appalled him with dread. Even now, at the station houses, no doubt, batches of members were being resuscitated, and the physicians were busy over the more obdurate cases. He thought with a pang of Barowich and his insensate resistance, his collision with the policeman, and the mad hash he would make of the League with the Commissioners. The conspiracy was matter for a Vigilance Committee; the machinery of the law must soon be at work to punish the perpetrators of so gross an indignity. Haunted with the ghosts of such terrors, he spent a sleepless night, awaiting the dawn. With the first sign of morning he would seek the Countess, and, together, the two would prepare for escape.

Before he had breakfasted, however, the telephone bell aroused him, and he took down the instrument to hear the voice of his co-partner welcoming him to a sort of courage.



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"I'm coming up immediately," she said. "I fear the worst. We must take counsel and organize our defense."

He was dressed by the time she came, and they spent an anxious half-hour together on the pink divan, with the plaster ogriillon sneering above them over its cynical motto: "I Wonder Why?" They discussed only the possible ways of escape; neither had the courage to refer to the previous evening's atrocity. Fly they must, but a few precautions were first necessary. There were incriminating papers and accounts at No. 7 Key Court to be destroyed, there was money to be raised; and, finally, their destination was to be decided.

Absorbed in these affairs, they were startled by a ferocious knock at the front door of the Peanut Shell. Roulhac crept to the window and looked out, haggardly.

It was the A. D. T. Kid. The Walking Peanut went into the narrow hall and opened the door; the messenger boy was admitted and then locked in. He was steaming with perspiration and out of breath.

"Howdy!" he said, and he took off his cap to the Countess. "Say," he continued, "de graft's played out! Yer up against it now, sure, an' it'll come to sour eggs if yer don't git a move on! Yer got to slope or else run fer mayor. Dey got it in fer de Countess, too! De hull town's as mad as a dog wid a tin can on his tail. Dey won't do a detailed ting to yer if dey catches yer!"

The three looked at each other in dismay. Then Roulhac asked, "Tell us all you know, and what they are doing down there!"

"See here. It was dis way. I seen de hull show, and Mudder, it was a peach. It beat out de minstrels! I seen youse two in de Lick House, an' I seen dat de fly cops was



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all onto yer. Den I took a crawl down to de city jail when dey ran in de stiffs and I got a hunch dat Barovitch was goin' to make a ragged old rough-house for youse bot'. Well, he come in spittin' blood and lather like he was a glass eater, and he braced up to de sergeant and begun to chew de rag good. Den I went back to de offis cos it was my night on deck. Well, I was give a deespatch fer de chief of perlice, and I got a hunch dat it was goin' to get you into a scrap, so I pried it open. It said 1031 Vallejo Street at nine termorrer, an' I copped de hull game. So I wrote, a bum wire and pushed it along, tellin' him ten instead of nine. Yer ain't got four minutes ter trow away, or youse bot' will be ridin' home in de hurry-up waggin'!"

"By jove!" cried Roulhac, "you've saved us, Infant!" Then he turned curiously to the prodigy. "See here, what's your graft? You don't look like you lived on balloon juice. There ain't a half a biscuit in this for you, I'm afraid. I'm broke. Sorry, kid, but if you expect to snatch any long green you've been buncoed. All the same, I'm much obliged!"

The A. D. T. Kid squared himself against the wall. "Youse give me de Willies!" he exclaimed. "I ain't in dis fer my health, cos it comes to bein' trun out of de force, see! But all de same I ain't no bum. I never t'ought youse burned government bonds in dat fireplace, but I knew youse was straight goods. 'A feller dat kin sling English like dat guy,' I says, 'he's all right!' An' de Countess she kin put her 'close in my trunk an' open all me letters. Dat's straight. Now just come down ter brass tacks. 'I'll flag 'em,' I says, 'an' if dey don't get pinched I'll go up to de cathedral and give Saint Joseph an earache of de 33rd degree.' I don't very often get up to de old charac-

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ter foundry on Sundays, but if de Walkin' Peanut comes out alive I'll do time wid de holy Willies. As fer de Countess, she's a t'roughbred greyhound, and she'll side-step de Chief easy widout tryin'!"

The lady in question tore off a pair of rings and handed them to the boy. "Here, take these, bless you, my son. They'll stand you the car fare home, anyway!"

The Kid put one on each thumb and regarded himself with a pert gesture. "Say!" he said, "I look like a drug store winder on a dark night! Dem's swell lamps, all right. But youse gotter slope pretty pronto! We can't stand here and shoot hot air all day! De cops is due in ten minutes an' dey'll be on time!"

The trio held a hasty consultation. Before it had come to any definite point, the messenger, lolling with a cigarette in the window, cried: "Hully Arrarat! Here dey come now!"

The case was, indeed, desperate, for a group of men, headed by the gesticulating Barowich, were climbing the wooden stairs. They came up to the front door and pounded without consideration for the quaking nerves of the occupants.

The A. D. T. Kid put his head out of the window. "Maybe youse tink dis is a bass drum," he remarked. "Go on and get yer uniform on, foirst, an' den let de bug wriggle!"

"Who's inside there?" demanded the waiter.

"A Maxim son-of-a-gun wid a pocket full of six-inch rapid firers!" said the imp.

"You young scoundrel, open that door, or I'll break it down!" cried one of the men, whose voice was recognized as Colonel McArthur's.



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“Hand out yer search-warrant!” said the youngster. “But don’t push on de door, or else you might be liable to fall into de six-shooter.”

The men, evidently without the legal instrument necessary to formalize a forced opening of the Peanut Shell, drew aside for a colloquy. Meanwhile Roulhac and the Countess had racked their wits for a possible means of escape. The hint came first to the Walking Peanut, and he ran up to his young ally.

“See here,” he asked, “can you stand ’em off for ten minutes? Can you give ’em the Grand Transcontinental Jolly while we change our clothes and slide out the back window?”

“Sure!” said the boy, scornfully. “I’ll shoot off me mout’ till further notice, if dat goes. Jolly ’em!” he repeated. “Why, I could spiel fer Satan outside o’ de bad place till de saints came down outer Heaven wid their haloes ter stand in line at de box office! I’ll give ’em de Grand Wot’s-Dis-and-all! Why, I belong in de Orpheum, only I’m too good fer vodeville stunts! Just watch me!”

He went up to the second story and opened the window without fear. The crowd had gathered since his previous burst of eloquence, and it now consisted of fifty or more men and children. Some dozen of these were the tattered-malion refugees of the Hypnotic Club, attired in incongruous garb, seized haphazard from the mass of clothing abandoned the night before on Montgomery Street. Here was a citizen in frock-coat attempting to cover a pair of blue jean overalls, there a Chinaman in tweed cutaway and silk hat, or an Italian organ grinder in knickerbockers. Barowich was clad in his own proper raiment, but his evident insanity made him an equal butt of ridicule with the

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others. The sight of this increasing audience was like a Martini cocktail to the spirits of the A. D. T. Kid, and there descended upon him the gift of tongues.

“Say, dis here looks like de layin’ de corner-stone of a Fourt’ Street saloon by de Ancient Order of Hibernians! Youse guys in de rear ranks wants ter move up, or youse won’t hear de speech! If youse lookin’ fer de Walkin’ Peanut an’ his steady, dey’s in behind de door wid six-shooters, and de guy what tries to do any barn-stormin’ had better step right up and get it in de epiglottis. If youse got a warrant fer to break into dis shack, youse can shove it t’rough de keyhole and we’ll O. K. it and file it wid de assets of de Company. If not, youse better get outer de range of de artillery. Youse cheap sports wot played in de Christmas pantomime at de Lick House last night can step up, an’ if dey’s any kick comin’ we settle all claims on Saturdays and yer two days ahead o’ yerself. Youse oughter go down Sout’ o’ Market Street and git a job to be wooden Injun fer de cigar stands. As fer dat bale o’ dope down dere wot woiks de plates at Campi’s bun shop, he can spit out his teeth in de front yard w’ere de las’ guy wot come lookin’ fer a scrap left his face. Now we got no time to give a poke-out to all dese hobos an’ Weary Willies, an’ de push had better get legs to demselves before de fight’s pulled off. If youse try ter pull up de landscape and trun it at de windows, somethin’s going to happen! I’ll order out de Boxers in de cellar as soon as de foirst man breathes. De price of admission to dis show is a bump in de back of de neck, an’ I’m spielin’ fer de undertaker, sure. We did n’t expect to run no cheap Morgue, but dey’s room inside fer any bloke what wants ter be struck by lightnin’, see?”





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While this impassioned flight of oratory cozened the mob outside, the two refugees within had not been idle. Casting rapidly about for a disguise, the Countess fell upon the silent form of Miss Gladys Harmony, and, in a trice, the manikin was stripped and her clothing transferred to a living form. The costume, as has been said, was incongruous, and the Countess winced as she slid on a jacket with the huge sleeves of the year 1894. The skirt, too, was of an ancient cut, and the combination dowdy to the point of absurdity. On they went, however, garment after garment, until the lady stood, a spectacle of mirth to herself, as she must soon be to the community.

"Well," she said, daring a glance at the mirror, "it's only the worst step that costs!" Then, with a pang, she dressed the lay figure in her own discarded gown and buttoned on the blue waist with its gold braid and buttons, the navy belt buckled over all.

Roulhac had also been at work, and in a minute or two he appeared in golf suit and tennis cap. He looked at the Countess with a sickly grin. "Ready for the fancy dress ball?" he asked.

"Tell me first," she implored, "who I am! What is my name? Before, I was pure Countess Rouge all over. I must know the name for this costume. Quick! Hurry! A moment's delay may ruin us!"

"That red waist," said Roulhac, with an effort of memory, "belonged to a Miss Myot."

"Her first name! Quick!"

"Her name was Valeria," confessed the young man.

"Now the skirt! Don't you understand, gander? I must know my name!"

"The skirt — oh, it was Celestine's!"

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The Countess lost her patience. "Dunce, fool, ninny, dolt, blockhead, numskull, moon-calf, noodle, nincompoop, jackass, donkey, gaby, zany, ASS!" she cried. "What was her last name? Don't you know I take my family name from my skirt?" she wept. Excitement had unnerved her.

"Oh, pardon me. Jewburg," he said, "Celestine Jewburg."

The smile came back to her lips as the sunshine pierces a cloud. "I am Valeria Jewburg, then, God help me! But I must have a title!" she insisted, insatiate. "Am I maid, wife, or widow, miss or mistress, lady, princess, or what? It's the *bat*," she explained madly, holding in her impatience. "I must have something on my head, even if I am to be called Auntie!"

Roulhac dodged to and fro amongst his properties in despair, then he ran upstairs to his chamber closet. As he entered the front room, a rock smashed through the window, and broken glass spattered him.

"Dey's begun to take a little whirl in real estate," remarked the A. D. T. Kid. "Youse better hustle!"

Down the stairs again, four at a time, jumped the Walking Peanut, in his hands the blue bonnet of a Salvation Army lassie. "It was Major Bessie Looyer's," he gasped. A shock at the front door warned them that peril was imminent.

"We must make our get-away quick," he added. "We'll have to go the back way."

Somewhat sheltered from Florence Street by a high fence was a window in the ell of a vacant house next door, and, spanning with a shutter the little gulf between, the runaways crept into the damp and mouldy sanctuary of Number 35.



REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM

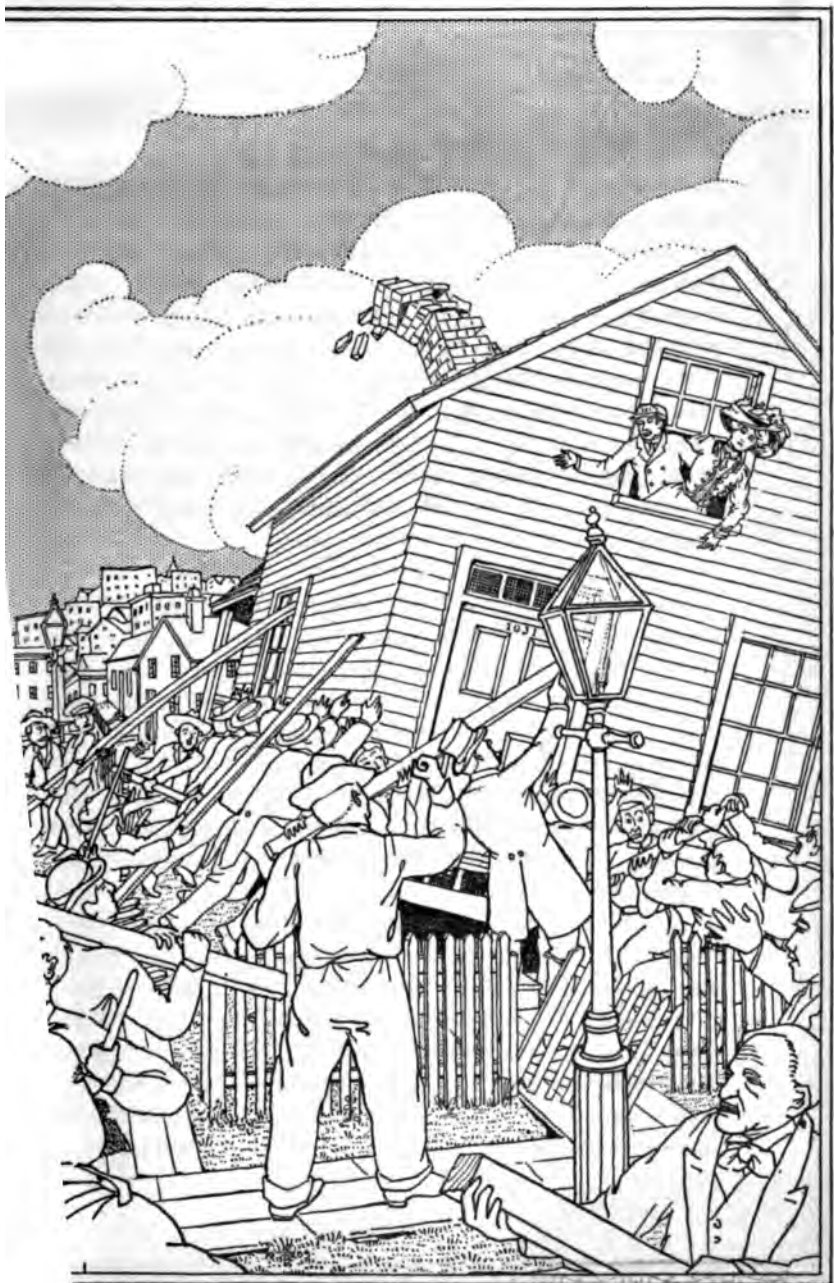
At the Peanut Shell the battle royal still went on, and the A. D. T. Kid poured virile trope and metaphor and graphic synonyms upon the heads of the encircling horde. Barovich, fearful of using force until vindicated by the presence of the police, so unaccountably detained, vented his wrath in spasmodic blasphemy. Rapp and McArthur stood guard at the door, ready at the word to break it down, and Professor Dolittle, in a foolish masquerade of misshapen clothiery, pounded incessantly at the side of the house with a picket torn from the fence. But the sarcastic farrago of the messenger in the window kept the crowd together in a lump, spellbound at his volubility. When that cascade of verbiage ceased, it was evident that the house would fall. The A. D. T. Kid, with a sublime faith in his cause, lighted another cigarette and burnt it as incense upon the altar of the Muse of Slang.

"See here," he enjoined the multitude. "I'm overwhelmed by dis entoosiastic reception! But I ain't quite up to such a swell push, an' I'm afraid Chinamen wid Willieboy coats ain't in my class. I feel like a wart on de nose of a real t'oroughbred Razmataz Lulu. I'm conspicuous, but I spoil de looks of de cake. But de truble is, we ain't got more 'n enough blushes in de coop for breakfast, an' so yer gotter put up wid dis apology. God created me in an absent-minded moment, jus' before de w'istle blew for to quit woirk. It was t'ree minutes to six an' he had a little speck o' mud left over. 'Gosh!' he says, 'on'y a teaspoonful o' brains left in de bin, wot am I a-goin' to do?' Dat's w'y I ain't put up to address such a gang o' high-brows as I see before me, but if de A. D. T. Kid is good enough fer youse, he's good enough fer me. Now, de Walkin' Peanut here, and his lady frien' is willin' ter arbi-

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trate dis strike as soon as de walkin' delegate screws his nut and de sheriffs make good wid de warrant. But if youse tries to push a hole t'rough de house wid a log, dere 'll be a hot time in de ol' boi'g dis forenoon, an' we 'll give yer all de contrac' calls fer w'ere de hair is short. Now, youse swell guys wot 's got a kick comin' fer me frien' Svengali, brace up, an' we 'll make yer t'ink yer oughter live on de dark side o' de moon, and de Perfessor dere wid de stick what 's tryin' to raise black an' blue spots on de side of dis door, I give him notice to quit before he gets pulled up by de roots an' trun inter de ash barrel. Now, I don't wanter give de Angel Gabriel any chanct ter chalk down a 'damn' against my name in de Judgment Book, fer dere 's a lady present, an' bein' as I got a toad in me gullet from spoutin' so much po'try to dis here Browning Club, I'll interdooce de nex' speaker."

He left the window for a moment and soon reappeared with the stiff form of Miss Harmony, now clad in the Countess's garments and hat. Her ruddy hair was a good counterfeit of the auburn locks of the lady who was at that moment crawling through the kitchen window, but her calm and placid expression should have betrayed the cheat. The dummy, however, was instantly hailed as the deposed Queen of the Hypnotic Club, and her appearance was greeted with a yell from the furious members of the League; all except Ruby, who shrunk into a voluminous waistcoat. Water enough will put out a fire; a little will but make it burn brighter. The apparition of the imitation Countess inflamed a revolution. With a yell, Barowich vaulted the fence and sprang to the side of the house on Florence Street. He was followed by a score of members, with whom he had just held whispered consultation.



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The cottage stood, top-heavy and leaning sadly out of the perpendicular, on rotting foundations. It was old and insecure, a decayed shell. The volunteers, seeing its state, put their shoulders manfully to the side of the house, and, heaving with all their might, rocked the Peanut Shell to and fro. The fringe of spectators, amongst whom were the permanent foes of the A. D. T. Kid and the scurrilous tormentors of the Walking Peanut, reinforced the agonists at the wall of the cottage. With their mighty struggle the frame leaned, hung in unstable equilibrium and fell with a crash into the vacant lot at the side. Professor Dolittle swarmed over the top of the wreck and struck a heroic gesture.

Roulhac had, meanwhile, made all haste, and, with the spirited monologue of his gallant rear-guard ringing in his ears, he had towed his partner through the aperture in Number 35, past several bare rooms, and had opened the front door. This he reached at the psychological moment, and the two stepped into the little narrow lane of Florence Street just as the Peanut Shell collapsed. In the confusion of that exciting moment, the Walking Peanut and Major Valeria Jewburg, S. A., hurried down the street in the direction of Broadway.

A half-block south of the Peanut Shell, Florence Street ends point-blank in a small precipice, the drop into Broadway being some twenty feet high. Down this declivity runs a wooden ditch or flume box set to carry off the water into the street below, and this the two descended, not without damage to their clothing. They tumbled finally upon the sidewalk with no bones broken, and made down Broadway with all the haste that the concrete pave-



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ment of this, the steepest block in San Francisco, permitted. From there they plunged into the Latin Quarter, and, at last discovering a tramp hack, jumped in and were driven with fury to Key Court.

This was like entering the lions' den, but the risk must be taken. It was likely that any members free at that time of day would be present at the storming of Russian Hill; they had to fear, at any rate, only the more strenuous lieutenants betrayed by last night's orgy. The club-house was deserted, as it proved, and ten minutes at No. 7 sufficed to destroy all trace of their conspiracy and to make sure of the realizable assets of the League. Here, too, the Countess found an appropriate though modest gown in the house-keeper's room, and, clad in this, she dared adventure the town. Roulhac, too, was in a similar manner rehabilitated, and, this work finished, the twain made ready for their final flight, hoping to cross the Bay to Oakland before notice was sent to head them off at the Ferry.

They had just emerged from the Court into Geary Street, where their carriage was waiting, when, running down towards them, more a maniac than ever, Barowich hurtled, hatless, dusty, but alone. With a fierce cry he ran up to the elopers and laid a heavy hand upon Roulhac.

"By heavens, I've got you now!" he screamed, and then he yelled over his shoulder for the police.

It seemed all up with the unhappy pair, when the Countess, with the calmness of despair, said freezingly to their captor, "Barowich, you're an ass!"

At the words a sudden miracle was wrought. Barowich, before so defiant and so impregnable to the hypnotic influence of the Controller-in-Chief of the League, who had boasted of his independence of all hypnotic suggestion,

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succumbed instantly to the gaze of the infuriated scornful lady he had attempted to detain. Roulhac remembered, now, her confession of having had Barowich under her control before she had chosen a newer and cleverer accomplice in the great conspiracy. Like a fakir's magic tree the suggestion in the spoken words took root and grew. The waiter collapsed; he fell upon all fours, and, stiffening his legs and arms, protruding his head and neck, there on Geary Street he brayed aloud, a very ass, as the Countess had so carelessly proclaimed.

They were not slow in taking advantage of this opportune rescue from their oppressor. Jumping into the hack, they drove post-haste to the Ferry. They were saved.

"Wait here," the Countess ordered, "while I buy the tickets." She was standing in the great arcade of the depot, and she came up to him and took his hands. "Look at me!" she said. "We've had a good time together, haven't we? We've turned the town upside down, as I promised, haven't we? I have made life interesting for you, and you *do* love me just a little, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, of course, but we must hurry!" said Roulhac, looking about nervously. "This is no time for a lover's dialogue!"

The Countess Rouge came a bit nearer. "Look in my eyes," she said. Then, as he gazed at her, he saw a different expression than usual upon her face.

"What is it?" he cried. "What is the matter? Why do you look at me so, Countess?"

"Kiss me!" she said in a deliberate voice that rang with a strange cadence. He stooped and kissed her on the lips.

* * * * *



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The next thing Roulhac knew, he found himself sitting on the bulkhead of a wharf on East Street, his legs dangling over the water. Beside him huge ships and barques pushed their bowsprits into the street, a maze of masts and spars towered over his head, and all around sat loafers like himself, idly watching the stevedores loading or unloading the vessels docked alongside. The Oakland ferryboat was pushing her huge ungainly bulk across the fairway towards Goat Island. Where was the Countess? He did not know.

Then a spark of suspicion traveled through his brain, lighting here and there the tinder of his memory. Was it all a dream? Was the escape but a hallucination? Had there been no storming of the Peanut Shell — would it be safe to return? Then, with a rush, his doubts closed in on him. The Thousand Men in Night-shirts — was that, too, a vision? It was too improbable to credit. But then, the winter's preparation, the whole history of the conspiracy — what, then, was true? His mind had nothing real left to catch hold on. He thought of his first mad call on the Countess, in her Hyde Street apartment, when she threw the chair into the mirror. Who could believe such a whim as that? And, finally, retracing his steps, he came back to Campi's, where he had first seen her, where she had given him that mysterious smile! Was even that true, or did his mania date from that moment?

There was no doubt, however, that the Countess had hypnotized him, somewhere, somehow — at Campi's — on Hyde Street — in his rooms — or at the Ferry? When? By what means was he to disentangle truth from error in the mad history of the winter? Perhaps it was not even yet winter. One could never tell in California.



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Perhaps, indeed, and his courage went down, now, totally extinguished before the sudden whirling of his fears — perhaps there was not, and never had been, any such person as the Countess Rouge!

He did not know.



Book Three

THE CULT OF MARS

*By Phœbus, my sweet facetious rascal, I could
eat water-gruel with thee a month for this jest, my
dear rogue!*

(Cynthia's Revels.)





Chapter One

A SYMPHONY REHEARSAL

Here's notable order! now for a trick to tame ye!

(The Knight of Malta.)



BOSTON'S *baut ton*, cloaked and bonneted with propriety, was assembled in the old Music Hall. Culture was out in its war paint, improving the occasion to the death. The cream of the city, assiduously skimmed by a myriad intellectual processes, branded "elect" and warranted chemically pure, sterilized from the last germ of vulgarity, flooded the floor. Outwardly the scene was not gay, for the woman of the Hub is a somber ungainly bird at times, but if the tops of the heads of the audience had been opened, the brilliance would have flooded three rows of balconies.

Sets within sets, circles within circles, the social machine whirred and clicked about a dozen important pivots like an accurate chronometer, setting the absolutely correct time for the outer world. The escapement was nicely regulated to the prevailing pitch of precise and positive appreciation. The minute hand of Boston's æsthetic dial pointed to the exact degree of musical ability the Symphony Orchestra had attained. Like a conscientious alarm-clock the applause was timed and went off with a flapping of gloved hands at the psychological moments. There was



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no fervor, no excitement or feverish approval, except the minor spasms of the upper galleries, where Temperament and Emotion sat, crowded to the stairs.

The Orchestra was on trial, the new leader pleading not guilty at the bar. The programme, couched in occult terms, analytical, technical, abstruse, guided the few barbarians, but the description and history of the Opus was disregarded by the members of the assembly, who boasted an unbroken line of attendance at these celebrated Rehearsals. The chosen representatives of Boston's immortal precedence in the arts sat with averted eyes, or spoke in low polysyllabic tones of the individual merits of members of the Orchestra, whom they knew, each hairy head, by name.

The violin bows rose and fell in unison, each handled by a master. The serried performers on the brass pumped rhythmically, accompanying the birdlike pleasantry of the wind instruments. Vibrant color schemes blossomed and died into sonorous silences, waved up in *forte* and *prestissimo* to expire again in the titillating agony of the wood. The leader waved his baton, now suavely, now with emphatic urgency, as if to affright from his score invisible flies swarming like semi-quavers upon the staves.

There were women, women everywhere. Women to burn, women to throw at the birds, women to sweep up and empty out of window. Those upon the floor and in the first balcony were all known and named; each had her station set and signed, — Back Bay, West End, Brookline, or Cambridge, — and each was identified by club, cult, or charity, each a thinker, a reader, and a goer-to-lectures, proficient in the rant, cant, slang, and patter of her tribe.

In the center of the hall, where her seat had been held in



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almost feudal tenure for years — and a year is long in Boston — sat Mrs. Braxton-Burlap. Not a soul in the audience but knew, by sight or by fable, this uncrowned Queen of Boston, and her bonnet was the first thing pointed out to the rural visitor at the Rehearsal. But who was the lady directly in front of her? Nobody knew, and the mystery of her presence bathed her exclusive abutters in a mist of gossip. Was she from Roxbury, Chicago, or beyond? A parvenue, newly promoted from the South End? Some country cousin usurping the high place of Fashion? Little glances flew to her, circled round her head, sniffed, pecked, and fluttered back to their nests in female eyes.

The stranger was an airy figure, fluttering with femininity, faultless in form, in commendable millinery of foreign make, and of a surety of presence that invited remark. Her head was entrancingly set upon her shoulders and heavy with dull red hair. Her eyes were blue, her gown was blue, her blood also, no doubt of that. Her violets perfumed the air far up and down the center aisle where she had entered.

The horns had mounted in a harrowing *crescendo* ending in a fatal crash of all the drums and brasses; and, in the rapt stillness following the cataclysm, a little wood-pipe was twittering, when the History of Boston turned over a new leaf. The beautiful unknown rose in her seat, stretched her arms aloft, tottered in the aisle, ejaculated a phrase of unintelligible jargon, and fainted away.

Frozen in shocked horror, female Boston sat aghast at the scandal. Two pale striplings plunged unwillingly from their seats, their long lank locks awry, and gave succor to the unfortunate lady, drew her feet foremost to the door



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and out into the corridor. The audience, faithful to its traditions, did not turn its head, deprecating the outrage to musical sensibility, though the rustic occupants of the seats just below the ceiling pierced the distance with strenuous eyes. In four minutes the disturbance was over and the insulted community reassumed its dignity. In the convulsive interim, however, some of the more impressionable had, to regain their composure, committed the heartrending solecism of reading their programmes.

What had happened? No one realized the full tenor of the event, but it was as if Boston had seen a ghost. Who was it who had sat in her unwarrantable seat cocking a flighty, jimpriculate blue hat at Boston's purest and best? Whoever it was, she had become a celebrity, for she had made Boston marvel.

Such was Miss Mischief's entry into the intellectual capital of the new world. She was come to take Boston by storm, and already she had carried the outer barrier of the barbican. Bastion, scarp and ramp, tower, dungeon, draw-bridge and keep would yet be hers. She had sworn it by the polished pale pink nail of her littlest left-hand finger, and by not so much as the filing her manicure would sacrifice in a scant half-second would she abate her promise. She was here to pull up culture by the roots and replant it nearer to her heart's desire. Naughty nonpareille! She was again at her pyrotechnics, for it was indeed my Lady Méchante, now to be new named and famed in Massachusetts.

She unhandled herself in the corridor from her lackadaisical rescuers and tossed a kiss through the small round windows of the swinging doors. Then she skipped downstairs towards Bromfield Street and jauntily collided with—

Who but Guy Bounder; and he in a plaid waistcoat!



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“Florry, by the Lord George Hell!” cried the Londoner, all trace of the Cockney gone, rehabilitated, glowing with success, consummate in style, a monocle agog in his left eye, and a grin of astonishing proportion. Miss Mischief slid into his arms, biting his sleeve to coerce her laughter. The two quivered with the astonishment of the recognition.

A policeman eyed them strictly, and they fell apart to tripple down the stairs into the court by the flower-sellers. From the inside of the building a wave of harmony thrilled; the end of the Symphony was dangerously near. Already a spattering of spasmodic suburbanites had fallen out and were bustling for the electric cars and the Subway.

Seeing this, the lady drew Mr. Bounder aside and, taking his arm, floated him to the Common, aiming her course for the Long Walk that springs up Beacon Hill from the Tremont Street Mall.

“Guy here!” she said to herself, thinking sharply, “Mercury help me, for I have no lie ready in my bodice! I must use him, though, for he is ready at my hand, and the old glamour sticks by him.” Yet the memory of his last prank came to her in all its hideous indecency and upset her with mirth. She saw him in London raving through Sussex Square, naked to the waist, with a shredded corset, and a green hat off one ear, in a woman’s skirt, fleeing into Bayswater, a flibbergibbet pariah, undone by her own neglect! And now he was dressed for a wedding at high noon, the pinnacle and cap of fashion with an American set-scene! It was too much.

She led him to a bench under a maple bearing a Latin inscription and sat him down. Then, with characteristic shrewdness, she delivered her question before he could

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interrogate her first. "What, in the name of the Green Brougham, does it mean, your being here?" she said.

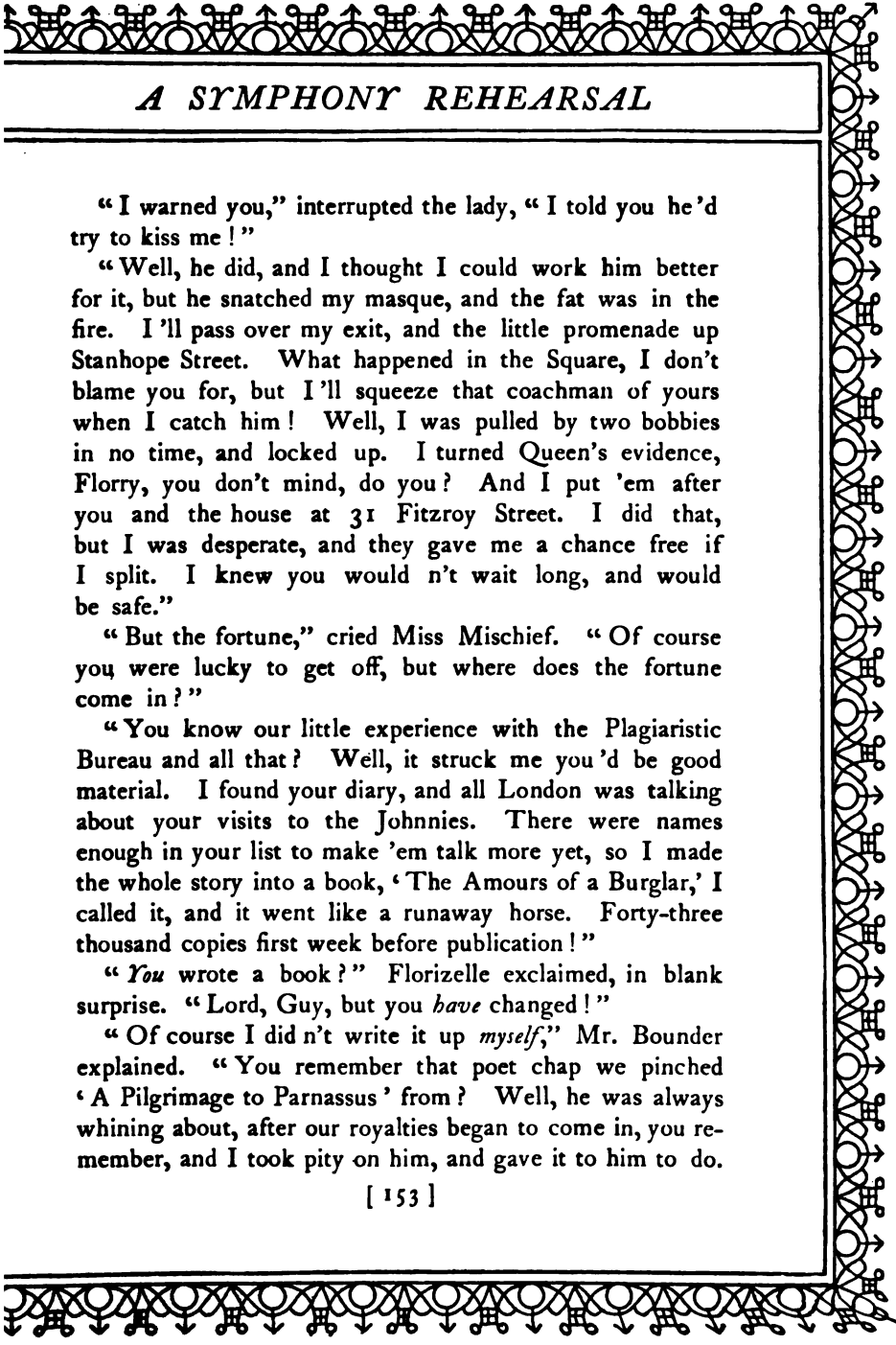
Guy had lolled along with her without sharing the excitement. Events, it seemed, had steadied him. He was reinstated, and resumed the caste of the Unastonishable Briton. "Florry," he said, and he laid a lavender glove upon her muff, "if I have ever reproved you, I apologize now. Twice you have made my fortune, and I have no ill feelings."

"Nor should you," she added, "for I am about to make it again!"

"I believe you," he replied. "Ask me to jump over that steeple at Brimstone Corner, and I would turn into a flea to accomplish it!"

"But *do* go on," Miss Mischief insisted. "I must confess you arouse my curiosity. When I last saw you, Guy, you — er — were slightly embarrassed, you know. Tell me whatever happened next." And she bit the end of one finger of her glove in repressing a smile.

"I'll tell you, in two words," he said, and he gazed at her fondly as he spoke. "See here. You rather bilked me in our partnership, you know. No, I don't complain. That's all right, as it turned out. But you bilked me. We were in the game together as straight pals, the Méchante Burglary Company, Limited. My word, I did n't know how limited it was till I caught you making love to Mortimer Stencil. But I kept up my end of the game, and did my turns in the green brougham, dressed in your clothes, according to our agreement. Well, that last night Colonel Wetmore caught me, and let me have it good with the fire-irons and the butt end of a brass candlestick, gouty old fiend!"



A SYMPHONY REHEARSAL

“I warned you,” interrupted the lady, “I told you he’d try to kiss me!”

“Well, he did, and I thought I could work him better for it, but he snatched my masque, and the fat was in the fire. I’ll pass over my exit, and the little promenade up Stanhope Street. What happened in the Square, I don’t blame you for, but I’ll squeeze that coachman of yours when I catch him! Well, I was pulled by two bobbies in no time, and locked up. I turned Queen’s evidence, Florry, you don’t mind, do you? And I put ’em after you and the house at 31 Fitzroy Street. I did that, but I was desperate, and they gave me a chance free if I split. I knew you would n’t wait long, and would be safe.”

“But the fortune,” cried Miss Mischief. “Of course you were lucky to get off, but where does the fortune come in?”

“You know our little experience with the Plagiaristic Bureau and all that? Well, it struck me you’d be good material. I found your diary, and all London was talking about your visits to the Johnnies. There were names enough in your list to make ’em talk more yet, so I made the whole story into a book, ‘The Amours of a Burglar,’ I called it, and it went like a runaway horse. Forty-three thousand copies first week before publication!”

“*You* wrote a book?” Florizelle exclaimed, in blank surprise. “Lord, Guy, but you *have* changed!”

“Of course I did n’t write it up *myself*,” Mr. Bounder explained. “You remember that poet chap we pinched ‘A Pilgrimage to Parnassus’ from? Well, he was always whining about, after our royalties began to come in, you remember, and I took pity on him, and gave it to him to do.



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Tipped him twenty guineas, and he turned out some swell stuff, for once in his life."

"H'm — I think I'd like to read it," murmured the lady, lost in admiration of her partner's enterprise.

"I've got a copy here," said Bounder, and produced a small volume.

Miss Mischief examined it curiously. "Bound in pink, oh, Guy! don't you know I *never* wear pink? It's shockingly unbecoming! And what's this? That's not my picture, Guy; how *dared* you!"

"Oh, nobody knows it is n't," he-replied, cavalierly; "it's not quite so pretty, of course, but that makes no difference!"

"I'll never forgive you, never, *never*!" sobbed the lady.

"Oh, please don't take on so," said her escort, painfully disturbed. "I had no idea *that* would make any difference. I say, I'll get out another edition!"

She looked up, her eyes misty with tears. "There's only one way you can atone for this," she said. "You must help my game in Boston!"


"Done!" cried Guy Bounder. And they descended into the Subway and took a Reservoir car.

Chapter Two

THE QUEEN OF BOSTON

Ten such campfire constitutions as this would call the golden age again in question!

(Philaster.)

T was sacrilege!" exclaimed Mrs. Essery. "The hoyden! At the Symphony! Incredible! Bless me, she acted as if she were at a negro camp meeting. She screamed, Mrs. Burlap, she actually screamed! She might shriek aloud in King's Chapel on an Easter Sunday and go scot free — she might prance up the aisle backwards at a Lowell lecture — she might take off her shoes on the Common and throw them at the Colonel of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company during the Governor's Review, — but scream at a Symphony Rehearsal! It was vandalism! We are disgraced, my dear Mrs. Burlap, disgraced! It was my one hundred and fiftieth attendance at the Music Hall; there was something more than religious in the ceremony. They were playing Brahms. And she was actually in the seat in front of you! In front of Mrs. Braxton-Burlap! Why, in the old times she would have been 'ducked, feathered, and rode in a cart'! And you profess an interest in this shameless creature? I am overwhelmed!"

Her silken thorax distended in a mighty gasp, and she held up one hand with a gesture. Her agitation was pictur-



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esque. Mrs. Essery afloat upon the troubled waters of emotion was a sight for the scientific alienist. She towered like an inverted pyramid; she swung, in her profound mood, like a man-o'-war at anchor tickled by restless currents. She was top-heavy with the bulk and weight of her anger, and stared convulsively at the leader of society, who sat at the little silver-mounted tea-table.

Mrs. Braxton-Burlap was not beautiful. That is not necessary in Boston; but she had achieved a throne. Her hats, her fads, her protégés, had inspired legends. In Boston's folk-lore she stood pre-eminent. To know her or of her, to be familiar with what she patronized, to be acquainted with her enthusiasms, was a post-graduate course for every Boston débutante. Original and forceful, eccentric even for Boston, Mrs. Braxton-Burlap had no rival to question her reign.

"Ah, Mrs. Essery," she said, dissolving a crystal of rock-candy in a dish of Young Hyson tea, and adding a clove, daintily, "I am not so sure; really, I am not so sure!" She scrutinized the bubbles upon the meniscus of the liquor. "It was not musical mania, certainly. Assuredly there was something deeper in it. Did you catch what she said? Do you realize that the phrase closely resembled the ancient Cymric? She fainted, you think; I am not sure that it was not trance, somnambulism, or some more mysterious abnormal state. She had the hand of the psychic; her eyebrows sloped upward; her hair, too, was red. Surely these are not the stigmata of degeneracy. She must be a Person. It was very wonderful!"

"But she was seen sitting upon a bench on the Common!" cried Mrs. Essery, fuming with the indignity.

"Ah, yes, there is the marvel!" Mrs. Burlap assented.



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“But her companion was no common man. Did you notice how much he looked like a Belgian Hare? I have observed that the most spiritual men that have come from the Orient resemble animals. Extremes meet, my dear Mrs. Essery, and the nearer we approach the spiritual, the greater the analogy to the animal. The spiral curves upward, it is true, but it comes opposite the same pole at last, completing the circle. That man was, I am convinced, a mystic of a new sort. He reminded me of Vivekananda by, so to speak, his very dissimilarity. We must escape the obvious at all costs, and seek paradoxes where we may. Depend upon it, we shall hear more of them both!”

“Oh, of course, if you think *that*,” gasped the elder woman, and subsided at the dictum.

“It used to be said,” continued the uncrowned queen, “that we Bostonians knew nothing that was not believed, and believed nothing that was not new. The pun bears internal evidence of a Western origin. It is flippant and meretricious. But we do demand novelties. In other places, I believe, it takes seven years to accomplish the physical transubstantiation of personality, particle by particle. Here we have a more rapid growth, and, intellectually at least, we are newly created every year. This woman, if I am not mistaken, has a Mission, and has it come to pass that Boston shall condemn the importer of new tidings? I shall watch her!”

“But there is nothing left,” said Mrs. Essery, nodding her beaded plumes. “What cult can she create? We have thought of everything here in Boston, have we not?”

“My dear, my dear, it is not in new truths, but in the revival of old beliefs, that Boston has achieved her supremacy,” Mrs. Burlap insisted. “She may restore Calvinism,

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for all I know; she might well go back to the musical glasses, the time is ripe for it." She pointed her finger at an array of modern daguerreotypes upon the mantel. "Perhaps that is why she was at the Rehearsal, but I fancy not. I hope she is no alarmist!"

To the two now entered Miss Hetty Hattitude from the brick house across Chestnut Street. She was as correctly packed into her tailor-made garb as a fine cigar in its wrapper, and labeled with the standard hall-marks of convention. One felt assured of mildness and quality. In shape a slim gracile Panatela, in coloring a rich Colorado Claro, Miss Hattitude breathed an aroma of good taste and perfect construction according to the models in vogue. Her light chocolate hair hung about her head like smoke. She was dapperly dressed in brown with a golden belt which alone defied the strictness of her make-up. Her eye showed her a creature of possibilities; she had temperament; once lighted and she would burn! But as yet she was crisp and mannered, molded, as Boston molds her young, into a suspiciously prim severity. Her restless blue eye peeped, diminished, from a concave lens.

She walked straight up to Mrs. Burlap, exchanged a salute upon the cheek, and drifted to a *chaise longue*, drawing off a pair of ashen-hued gloves.

"And where have you been, dear?" said her hostess.

"In Vagabondia — in the Latin Quarter — in Nazareth," said Miss Hattitude, "that is, in the South End. One never knows nowadays where the Century Plant will bloom. The Saturday Morning lectures fixed a center to the town, but now new prophets arise in every suburb. It was on Columbus Avenue!"

The two ladies seemed surprised, but Mrs. Burlap re-



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covered her customary point of view. "And what more likely?" she said. "Columbus Avenue has long been considered but a row of cheap lodging-houses and Chinese laundries, but I assure you it is, in a way, positively Medieval. I have seen the legends of Practical Psychometrists, heaven save the mark, and there is, I believe, a College of Astrology extant upon that ill-paved boulevard. It is like a bit of twelfth-century Paris, except that the modern grisette and the Technology student are anachronisms. Mysticism flourishes on Columbus Avenue, I am well aware!"

"Indeed it does," assented the girl in brown. "It was really quite amusing. One longs so to believe this trash, you know. It is quite picturesque. If it were not so badly composed, this tinge of transcendentalism would be positively decorative!"

"Something will come yet, I am sure," said the Queen of Boston. "It is quite time — and why not in the South End? It is near fifteen years since it brought forth its last priestess."

"I really think so," Miss Hattitude complied. "One must investigate, one must place oneself in a passive state of mind. But this was *too* funny. It was, of course, as usual all about Phenomena. I am so wearied with Phenomena."

"Commend me to the terminology of your South End mystic for baldness of vocabulary," interposed Mrs. Essery. "They talk like musical boxes, the same scrap of tune perpetually repeated."

"But you may miss the inner significance, after all," Mrs. Burlap hastily interposed. "Say it is more like the prattle of infants. Who knows but they both are expressing the vague universal truths of the Cosmos, so rapidly lost,

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so hopelessly confused in their ignorance of the phraseology of this present existence ? ”

Mrs. Essery was silenced, and Miss Hattitude went on.

“Perhaps you can translate the farrago, then! It was a ‘Soul-Measuring Parlor’ I went to, and I was received by a mad Professor, a tall curly man with patent-leather slippers, who looked as if he had been waiting for us several hours. His wife was lying upon a sofa asleep, apparently having been talked to death. It was a horrid room, a jungle of old collars, newspapers, and photographs. The man said he was developing his wife’s sub-conscious ego, and her second self was supposed to be wonderfully clairvoyant. He said I was a psychic, too, and I think I must have blushed ! ”

“But was n’t there anything new ? ” queried Mrs. Essery.

“New! It was new to me to be received in the presence of a disheveled, semi-comatose wife,” said Miss Hattitude. “But as near as I can remember, he was some kind of combination of Mesmerist and Phrenologist. He said he was writing a paper on the ‘Relativity of Knowledge and the Unknowable’ for the Institute of Occult Science. And he was simply mad on Phenomena. He said we were only just beginning to understand Nature.”

“What did I tell you ? ” said Mrs. Burlap, triumphantly.

“Well, *he* had n’t more than just begun, I’m sure of that,” said the brown girl. “He said Science has given us only Facts, but what lies behind those Facts we don’t know ourselves, in our normal condition. What we have to do is to develop the sub-cerebrum by what he called Hyptonism, and bring about Phenomena! The true cause of things, according to him, was Phenomena and Sub-



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consciousness. Well, that woman was a phenomenon, if anything ever was. He said, 'What I claim is we need a new Media, and in that way we develop Aura and Conditions leading us to the Absolute!' Did you ever? Then he said a lot more about Consanguinity and Types and Tendencies and Anthropomorphism and Æstivation and Philopropogenitativeness and Amatitativeness and, of course, Nirvana!"

"Chuh! we stopped talking about Nirvana in 1889!" exclaimed Mrs. Essery.

"Yes, it is hardly time for more of that yet," said the hostess. "I admit he was cheap. But there's still hope."

"Then Miss Mischief came in, and he told her she was an Amalgamated Type!" said Miss Hattitude.

"Who?" cried both the other ladies.

"Why, she said her name was that, and I think she was the woman who fainted at the last Symphony Rehearsal!" Mrs. Burlap sat bolt upright.

"There! I *knew* it!" she proclaimed. "Tell us about her!"

"She came in with a man with a plaid waistcoat and a monocle, and she whispered all the time. She seemed rather hurt to be called an Amalgamated Type, but when the Professor informed her she was super-conscious rather than sub-conscious, she rallied. I came out with her and walked as far as the Providence Depot."

"How *could* you!" cried the lady of the silken thorax.

"Easily," asserted the young woman. "She was very interesting. She said she could do better than that herself, and had a mind to try. I promised her I'd come to her séance, and she said she'd send me a card. The man with her is going to help her out."



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“The idea! It’s a very serious thing,” said Mrs. Essery, who had become a convert to Mrs. Burlap’s *empressement*.

“She’s trifling, indeed,” said Mrs. Burlap, “but she may not realize her powers. I shall go too; decidedly she is a person to be studied. Did she say where she was from?”

“I did not inquire,” said Miss Hattitude. “She had an English accent, but she used barbarous slang. She must have been out West a considerable time. I doubt if Mischief is her true name, though.”

The two ladies were scandalized. An *alias* in Boston!

“Mark my words, something will come of this!” was Mrs. Burlap’s warning as the two callers left the house.

Chapter Three

CAT PARK'S SERIO-COMIC

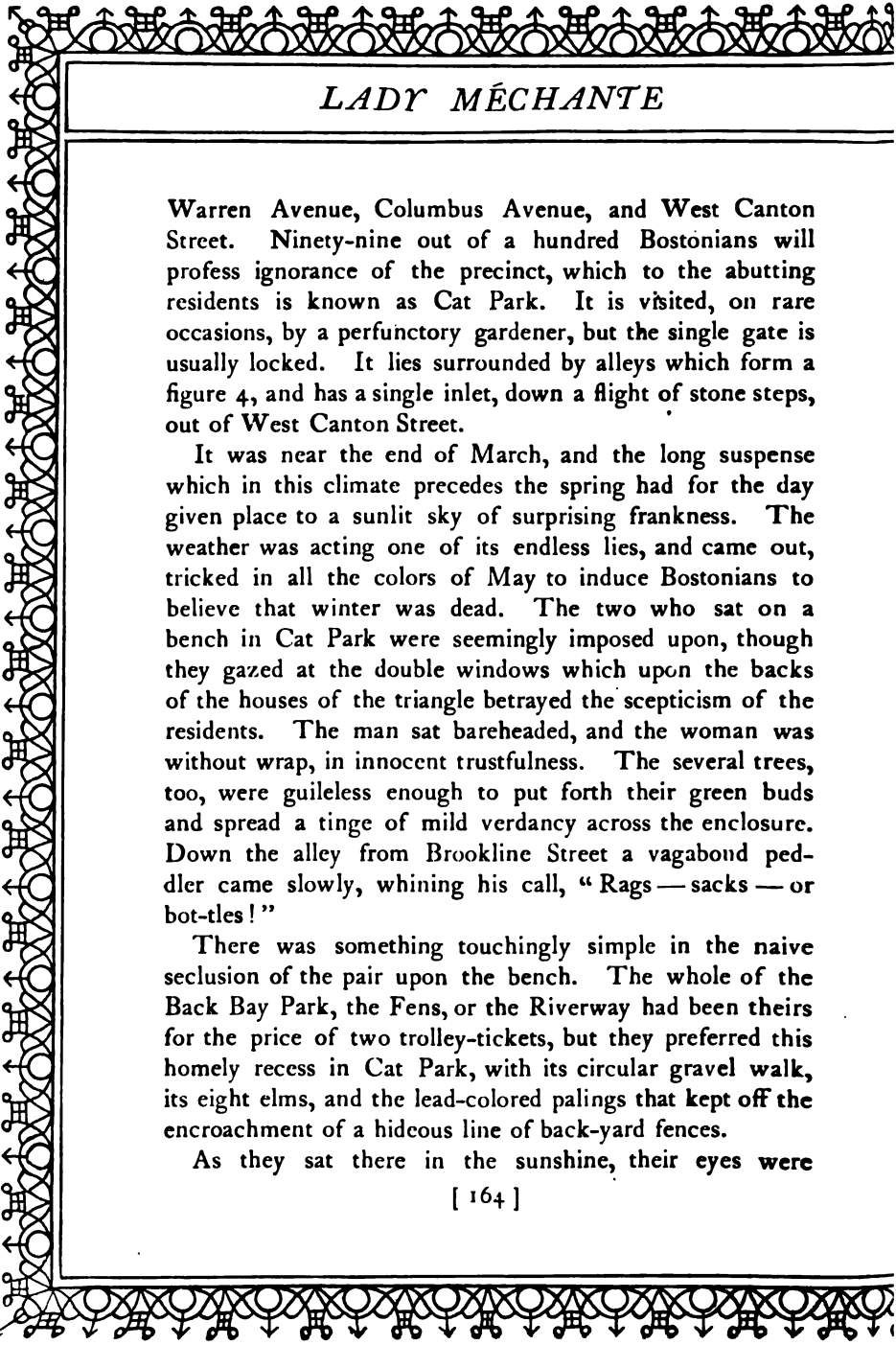
I feel a stark affrighted motion in my blood!

(The Maid's Tragedy.)



NOT alone in its intellectual character is Boston unique. Its geography, its topography, and the very plan upon which it is laid out, all are different from most American cities. Most original of all is the secondary system of alleys subdividing the blocks of houses, and whose minor passages, like tiny veins, connect the more important arteries. Down town, one may parallel Tremont Street from Boylston Street to Temple Place, and if you are a native, even to the City Hall, without ever traveling the main street, but by cutting across them and by successive plunges into the interior of blocks, escaping the thoroughfares. It is so even in the more modern district known as the South End, except that here the explorer may discover secret little parks, hidden higger-mugger in the midst of wildernesses of back yards — closes given upon by the windows of the surrounding houses, but unsuspected of the wayfarer. They are for the most part ill-kept, with slovenly trees and gravel walks, and visited seldom by anyone save urchins, scavengers, and rag-men.

Such as this is the mysterious islet of scant verdure, fenced with palings, that lies inside the triangle formed by




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Warren Avenue, Columbus Avenue, and West Canton Street. Ninety-nine out of a hundred Bostonians will profess ignorance of the precinct, which to the abutting residents is known as Cat Park. It is visited, on rare occasions, by a perfunctory gardener, but the single gate is usually locked. It lies surrounded by alleys which form a figure 4, and has a single inlet, down a flight of stone steps, out of West Canton Street.

It was near the end of March, and the long suspense which in this climate precedes the spring had for the day given place to a sunlit sky of surprising frankness. The weather was acting one of its endless lies, and came out, tricked in all the colors of May to induce Bostonians to believe that winter was dead. The two who sat on a bench in Cat Park were seemingly imposed upon, though they gazed at the double windows which upon the backs of the houses of the triangle betrayed the scepticism of the residents. The man sat bareheaded, and the woman was without wrap, in innocent trustfulness. The several trees, too, were guileless enough to put forth their green buds and spread a tinge of mild verdancy across the enclosure. Down the alley from Brookline Street a vagabond peddler came slowly, whining his call, "Rags — sacks — or bot-tles!"

There was something touchingly simple in the naive seclusion of the pair upon the bench. The whole of the Back Bay Park, the Fens, or the Riverway had been theirs for the price of two trolley-tickets, but they preferred this homely recess in Cat Park, with its circular gravel walk, its eight elms, and the lead-colored palings that kept off the encroachment of a hideous line of back-yard fences.

As they sat there in the sunshine, their eyes were



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fastened upon the machinations of two young girls in the rear window of a Columbus Avenue boarding-house. These were, it would seem, in a fit of the female giggles. Their hair flopped *à la* Pompadour over their brows and they were clad—well, not for the street. From time to time they held to the pane of their window large white letters cut from writing paper. It was not difficult to discover their system and its efficacy, for across the triangle, in the third-story window of a Warren Avenue room, a young man in a red flannel bath-robe commanded the comedy with a pair of opera glasses.

The two on the bench followed the pantomime with a listless abstraction and a feline comfort in the balm of the atmosphere. A painter daubing a back-yard fence with ochre had also been the mute participant in the scene and had vainly attempted to attract the attention of the frowsy damsels by inscribing huge yellow letters upon the unpainted portion of the boarding. He now held his brush idly and watched his rival in the window. Three small boys armed with wooden swords came dashing down the alley, filling the wooden lane with their cries. They galloped up the passage pursued by their opposing clan. The upper part of the figure 4, at its apex, was a *cul-de-sac* of high fences, but these the fugitives took manfully, escalading the barriers and swarming across the labyrinth towards an intricate but to them possible escape by way of Columbus Square. The riot spent itself in echoes, and all would have been still, but the rag-man had circumnavigated the parklet and was now droning down the other side.

The flirtation proceeded laboriously, but seemed to be, upon the whole, worth while to the ardent participants, who had obviously little else to do. The telegraph was



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clumsy and patent to any observer as it spelled out its silly message. M—E—E—T—U—S—A—T—T—H—E—
—P—U—B—L—I—C—L—I—B—R—A—R—Y” came, letter after letter, against the glass, the manipulators having not wit enough even to abbreviate. The youth across the way had begun his reply when the man on the bench spoke.

“This place has n’t changed a bit since I was a boy, Roberta,” said the hatless man. “To all appearances the scene inevitably generates the same incidents, year after year. How many such languid days I have spent, for all the world like that fool yonder, flirting across the park. Here, too, I was a juvenile barbarian. I tasted feudal days and fought out duels with wooden swords! I was tied up by my thumbs in that very corner! I believe this raggman is the same old Wandering Jew of my boyhood! But I never sat in this Park before! I never saw anyone ever sit here. I always thought it impossible. Even now I am wondering at my temerity. It was a place sacred to the predatory tom-cat, unsullied by human footprint! This adventure looms heroic, but I have lost an ideal. It is an anticlimax. I am almost sorry I came. We are a spectacle for the residents. This park is like a bouquet of wax flowers under a bell-glass, not meant to be touched, smelled, or even looked at, except askance, apologetically!”

“But whom did you flirt with across the way?” inquired his wife, Roberta. “Were you ever such a precious simpleton as that? Look at that nincompoop making a poster of himself in the window, now!”

“I confess,” replied the gentleman, fanning himself with a pot hat, “Cat Park, revisited after twenty years, does appear a bit tame, not to say foolish. Yet I must say the



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ass in that window arouses a passing tender memory. If I am not mistaken, Hetty Hattitude once lived at Number 467. That was before the great exodus from the South End. Her father made something like four hundred thousand dollars one afternoon, and the Hattitudes joined the migration. The Hegira had just set in, and the Back Bay was the land of promise for every humble resident of this district. The Hattitudes, however, were not satisfied with Flatland, and the desert of parvenues round about Newbury Street. They made boldly for Beacon Hill, and no one knows, now, that their propriety was not dyed in the wool.

Roberta yawned from the combined effects of the sunshine and her husband's soliloquy and turned her attention to the aerial flirtation. The Pompadours had just exhibited the figure "5" and it was answered by the letters "O K" from the window of the young man in the red robe. The dialogue seemed to be completed with the details arranged for the assignation, for at this the curtain of the Columbus Avenue apartment was discreetly drawn. Young Lothario, however, proceeded with his toilet in Arcadian simplicity, careless of observation.

Out of his window hung from short pieces of twine, three beer bottles. No doubt his amatory efforts had dried his tongue. At any rate, he appeared to be seized with a desire to possess himself of the liquid refreshment, and he raised the sash with that intent. The sill was low, the knot was troublesome, the breeze caught at his lace curtains and wrapped them slyly about his head. In his effort to free himself, something appeared to give way behind him, and, of a sudden, the gentleman found himself dislodged from his foothold and navigating the air.

Mrs. Stencill screamed. Mortimer turned just in time



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to astonish himself with the spectacle of a meteoric descent, from the third-story window, of an animated red bath-robe — a Darius Green dropped like an exploded firecracker projected from space. He jumped up, ran to the fence, vaulted the pickets and up the alleyway to the back door of Number 175 Warren Avenue, found it open, and entered, aghast at the expectation of a tragedy.

But it was a Monday, and every back yard in the block was hung with the washing of the dwellers. Here the place was grotesque with a display of damp linen of revealing shapes, black stockings, and other unmentionable articles of apparel. The young man's flight had ended with a violent bounce upon the tense clothes-lines stretched from fence to fence, and as Mr. Stencill entered, the victim was still enmeshed and shrouded in a trap of rope and moist, clinging sheets, growling profanely. Mortimer advanced delicately through the maze of wet cloth, and lent a hand to the unfortunate aeronaut.

Plucked of his winding sheets, the youth's appearance was hardly less ridiculous. The beer bottle was still firmly clutched in his hand, and his gaping robe permitted a display of sea-green underwear, as if he had been a frog who had jumped by mistake into an ocean of red ink. One might have permitted a certain air of bashfulness in the circumstances, but the new arrival from higher regions gave a polite and well-poised expression of thanks to his rescuer.

"'This is so sudden,' as the girl said," he remarked, jocosely. "Have a beer with me?"

"I expected to provide the bier myself!" said Mortimer Stencill. "Is it possible that your back's not broken?"

"Oh no," replied the stranger, "I usually come down this way. I believe a fellow named Darwin wrote a book





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about me once. Ever read the 'Descent of Man'? I thought so. But who's the lady at the gate? I don't usually receive callers in the back yard, but I feel honored, really!"

Roberta's white face appeared. "Is he much hurt?" she cried.

"Not so much hurt, madam, but that I shall forgive you the intrusion," said the madcap, and he made a low bow amongst a row of table-cloths. "I may have strained a point or two, in my haste, but I'll live, I warrant you. 'T is not so bad as a broken heart."

"See here," said Mr. Stencill. "You'd better come up to my room and let me look you over. You must have several inches of skin missing, at least, and I'll rub you down. I live here next door. I'll lend you something to put on to get home in, too."

"Many thanks," was the response. "I'll accept your invitation. I'll not conceal the fact that, for especial reasons, I'd rather not go upstairs looking like this. So, if you'll show me the way, I'll come with pleasure. I believe I have, on the back of my pate, a bump you might anchor a warship to. The next time I do a two-step out of the window, I'll wear football uniform or carry a parachute!"

"You certainly could n't be said to have a nervous, sensitive organization," said Stencill, "you'd make a good wooden Indian"; and he led the fallen angel out of the yard, and into the house next door. They went upstairs in quest of a suit of clothes and arnica. Roberta discreetly retired.

In the upper room the youth introduced himself as Mr. Roulhac Braghampton, of San Francisco. He was, he asserted, a Harvard medical student, though his method with

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his contusions belied him. He hinted darkly at ulterior pursuits, and Mortimer Stencill, always upon the lookout for the picturesque, plied him with hints and questions.

"I'm after a girl," Mr. Braghampton confessed at last. "I've chased her across the continent, and I have good reason to believe she's taken refuge in Boston, as the most unlikely place in the world to find one of her antecedents. I had a mix-up with her in San Francisco, and she's as mysterious as a gold brick. I was very fond of the defendant, but she gave me paper flowers, and I want to try another heat with her. She made me that an ass of, Mr. Stencill, that I could n't see a load of hay coming down the street without feeling hungry! No, I had n't a blush in the house for breakfast, after she got through with me. She made me think I was about eight years old, and I've barely caught up with myself yet. I thought I was a stem-winder, but I found out she had the only key that would fit."

"Who was she, and what did she look like?" demanded his interlocutor.

"She was anybody you cared to name," was the reply. "Kitty Carmine first of all, then Cicely Fex, and the Countess Rouge too. When we eloped, she was Celestine Jewburg, and when you knew Celestine Jewburg, you knew the limit! Look like? She looked like the lady on the twenty-dollar gold piece! Hair of the color of the inside of a cantaloupe, eyes like blue agate marbles, and a mouth like a pipe-dream! Oh, she was of the greyhound type, easy enough! She could pull down all the prizes in the show without a collar! Why, Congress would adjourn if she came into the room, sure. She used to wear blue, mostly; Parsifal blue, and gold braid that would jerk you right up and throw you over the fence. I went dotty at the first

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rattle out of the box, and she had me labeled and checked and her initials burned into me from the word 'go!' To come right down to brass tacks, I fell in love, and now I'm high and dry, with the tide going out. Would n't that slice you? I wanted to marry that girl, Mr. Stencill, I had it all mapped out for a Home Sweet Home factory, complete including triplicate mirrors and cockroaches in the kitchen, but she gave me the invisible footprint, and now I'm up a tree!"

"She must have been a lively baggage to get ahead of you," said Mortimer Stencill. "I never knew of but one that I think could do it."

"She *was* a pretty hot piece of pie! But who was yours?" said the Braghampton, pulling on Stencill's coat, after carefully inspecting the tailor's name in the inside of the collar.

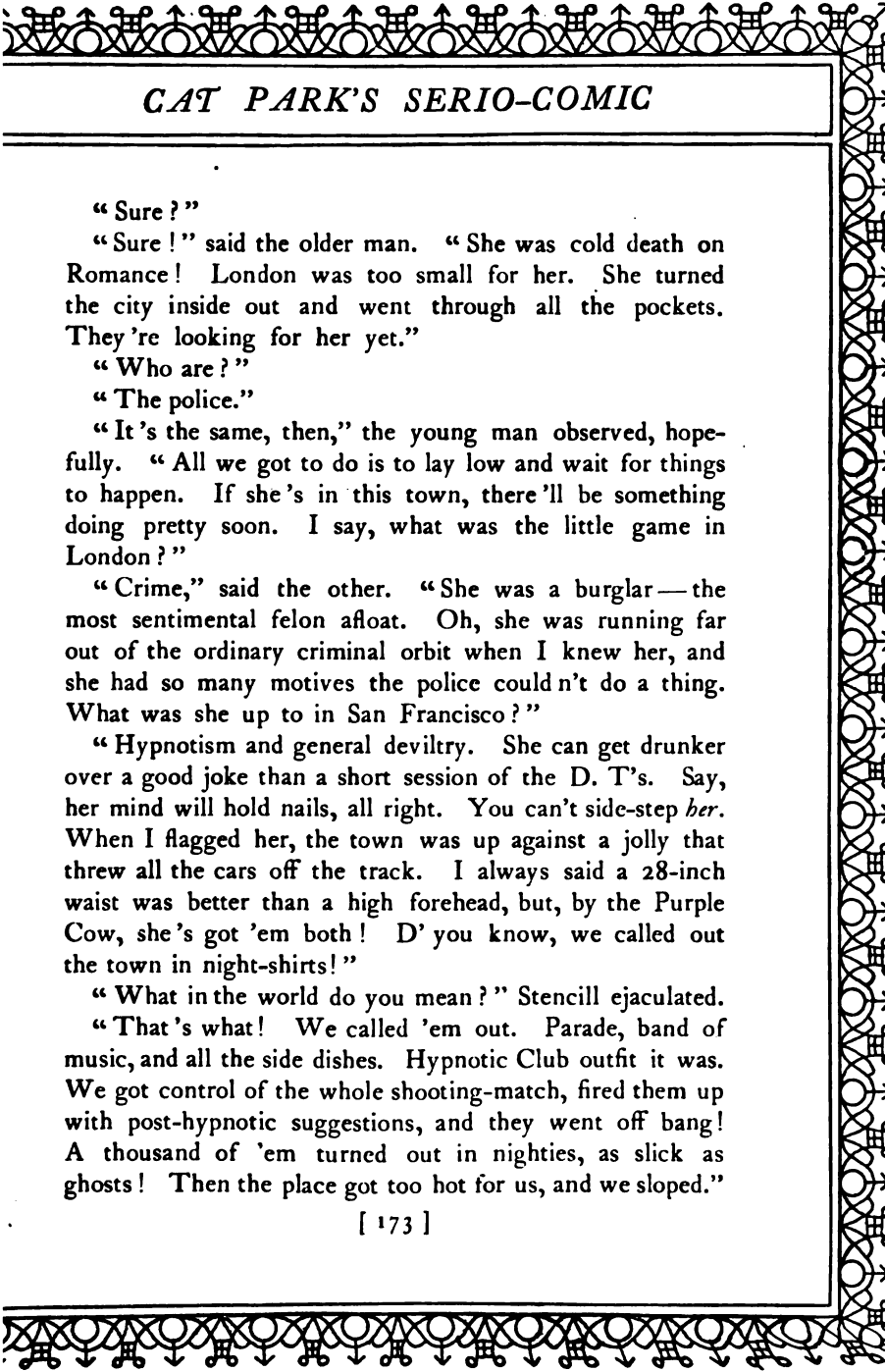
"They called her Lady Méchante, and she was the talk of London, two years since," was the reply. "I'd have fallen in love with her myself if I had n't already been so deep in I couldn't come up 'to the surface. She came over on the steamer with us, and she disappeared in New York as soon as we landed."

"If there's two of her kind on earth, it's time for me to go out of business," said Roulhac. "One is about ten million too many for me, and I'm no yop, either. But if I meet her, I'll die game. If she wants me to pull down the moon and paint the back side of it green, I'll have a go at it somehow! Did your seraph wear red hair?"

"Romanesque — and blue eyes, too," said Stencill.

"What d'you think?" said Braghampton, half closing his eyes.

"I think it was the same one."



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“Sure?”

“Sure!” said the older man. “She was cold death on Romance! London was too small for her. She turned the city inside out and went through all the pockets. They’re looking for her yet.”

“Who are?”

“The police.”

“It’s the same, then,” the young man observed, hopefully. “All we got to do is to lay low and wait for things to happen. If she’s in this town, there’ll be something doing pretty soon. I say, what was the little game in London?”

“Crime,” said the other. “She was a burglar—the most sentimental felon afloat. Oh, she was running far out of the ordinary criminal orbit when I knew her, and she had so many motives the police could n’t do a thing. What was she up to in San Francisco?”

“Hypnotism and general deviltry. She can get drunker over a good joke than a short session of the D. T’s. Say, her mind will hold nails, all right. You can’t side-step *her*. When I flagged her, the town was up against a jolly that threw all the cars off the track. I always said a 28-inch waist was better than a high forehead, but, by the Purple Cow, she’s got ’em both! D’you know, we called out the town in night-shirts!”

“What in the world do you mean?” Stencil ejaculated.

“That’s what! We called ’em out. Parade, band of music, and all the side dishes. Hypnotic Club outfit it was. We got control of the whole shooting-match, fired them up with post-hypnotic suggestions, and they went off bang! A thousand of ’em turned out in nighties, as slick as ghosts! Then the place got too hot for us, and we sloped.”



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“How did you lose her?”

“She gave me the mesmeric eye at the ferry, and I was lost in the shuffle. Hence these tears!”

“Godfrey de Bouillon!” exclaimed the Mortimer Stencil. “I think I’ll stay in Boston and see if she turns up.”


“You better!” said Roulhac. “There’s going to be a landslide in this neck of woods. I don’t know whether it will be a skirt dance on the roof of the Old State House, or filling up Charles River with pink molasses, but there’ll certainly be something doing, sure!”

Chapter Four

A FLIRTATION IN COPLEY SQUARE

'Fore God, she's a delicate dabcbick! I must have her.

(The Alchemist.)

 ROBERTA STENCIL'S interest in her friends and acquaintances was scarcely sharp and keen enough to be termed inquisitive, yet her husband called her a matchmaker. She had an observing eye, and no disguise was safe from her inspection. To travel with her upon a street car was to hear read the character and intimate habits of every passenger aboard the conveyance, and one felt the burden that was put upon her by being, even though unsuspected, a confidant of every sufferer from love or pride in the vicinity. Mortimer Stencil was an actor of indifferent merit, but his wife might have made a name for herself upon the stage. She was, however, condemned to the part of auditor and spectator, and she made it her business to read life from the evidence of tiny traits of deportment.

It was her whim, that afternoon, to spy upon the amour of the young man with whom she and her husband had become so strangely acquainted, and, towards half-past-four, the two made their way to the Public Library to enjoy the spectacle of Roulhac Braghampton at his arts. Affecting interest in the bronzes and frescoes, they endured the tedium of a half-hour's wait, but were unrewarded with a view of



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the San Francisco precocity. Two maidens in pompadours, chewing gum surreptitiously, they did see, the forerunners of the comedy, but their hero was apparently playing the laggard lover. The two girls at last, wearied of his inconstancy, departed in high dudgeon, bridling scornfully.

Like all women who are blessed with the powers of intuition Mrs. Stencill sometimes overshot the mark. In her pragmatic mind, from this time forth, Roulhac Braghamp-ton was branded craven. It did not matter that she strongly disapproved such cheap and easy familiarity as he had shown in his brazen flirtation, she felt herself personally aggrieved.

Her wrath was not diminished, therefore, when, upon leaving the Library with Mortimer, she met, face to face, the young reprehensible in full flower of decorum, smartly attired to the tune of the season, walking in assiduous converse with a young lady in brown. Roulhac bowed sedately and passed on. The girl with the smoky chocolate hair did not so much as look up. Roberta gasped at the change of partners, and turned to her husband with opened lips.

“Did you ever?” she ejaculated.

“Only once!” was his reply. “That man is a very Lochinvar! If I am not mistaken, the lady he is fascinating is none other than Hetty Hattitude. Braghamp-ton flies high.”

The compliment to Roulhac’s audacity was, in point of fact, not undeserved, but Fate had aided him. What he did not quite deserve, however, was Mrs. Stencill’s scorn. Some aberration of memory had misled him, and, with the strong conviction that it was upon the steps of the Art Museum, across Copley Square from the Library, that he



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was to meet the damsels of Columbus Avenue, had made him wait a dreary half-hour at the door of the terra-cotta edifice for the two who came not, having a more exact recollection of the rendezvous. It may be that Roulhac had in mind some previous assignation. At any rate, he was innocent of any trick of disloyalty to his promise.

He had waited, then, with what patience a line of impetuous ancestors had meagerly endowed his soul. He had thrice rearranged his tie under cover of the portal's gloom, and he had often resisted the temptation to use the neatly folded handkerchief in his breast pocket. But he had not waited alone. There was, it had seemed, another truant missing, and he cast glances of increasing interest upon the girl in brown who paced up and down in front of the Art Museum, in apparent anticipation of an appointment. When she came up and stood in the same archway, he felt encouraged, and the smouldering fires of curiosity burst into flames of resolve.

"I beg your pardon," he ventured, at last, to the girl, "but have you seen two young ladies enter this building? They wore no glasses," he added, "and I thought you might have noticed them."

The girl moved away a step and answered, "No, I have not."

"I was to have met them at five," he went on.

"Indeed?" said the lady.

"On the steps of the Library," Roulhac continued.

"Then they are probably waiting there. That is the Library, across the Square." She could not resist a smile.

Braghampton caught at the smile and ignored the information.

"I am very stupid," he remarked.



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The girl said nothing.

Roulhac was now at his wit's end to prolong the conversation. "I am afraid it may be incipient aphasia," he said, after a pause, without any sign of departing.

The girl seemed uninterested in his diagnosis, but evidently demurred. "It is undoubtedly nothing but an obsession," she asserted.

"Maybe you are right, for I am a victim to such complaints. Indeed, I have another now, which has replaced the original occupant of my mind."

The lady kept her silence, and looked across at the towers of Trinity Church.

"I am strongly under the impression that I know you," was Roulhac's next move.

"That is an illusion, delusion, or misconception," she said, without turning her head. She walked slowly down the stone steps.

"Don't you believe in intuition?" he insisted, following her.

She turned to him angrily. "I do. I have an intuitive knowledge that you are not a gentleman!"

"I lay no claim to the term," he replied, airily; "an honest *man* is the noblest work of God!"

"Honest!" she said, scornfully. "I beg you to leave me. If you say another word to me, I shall call that policeman on the corner."

"Then I shall be obliged to opine that you are unable to answer my argument," said Braghampton. "I was told that in Boston women were not beautiful, but intellectual. Must you shatter both beliefs at once?"

There was enough subtlety in this to make the maiden pause, despite her obvious reluctance to a continuation of

A FLIRTATION IN COPLEY SQUARE

the scene. She looked him over deliberately. "You are from the West, I presume. Is it usual, in your native place, for men to accost haphazard any lady they may chance to meet? Pray discontinue this annoyance. I am, as you see, awaiting a friend here, and I don't care to miss the appointment on your account."

"If you will answer me one question, I promise to accept my dismissal," said Braghampton.

Miss Hattitude hesitated, but the temptation was alluring. Her pause betrayed her. It was the fraction of a second too long. She saw this too late, cast down her eyes, and said, "Proceed!"

"Tell me then," said Roulhac, "if I were a new arrival from the planet Mars, or Venus, unused to your manners and customs, would you be equally willing to deny me free speech with you?"

"No," said Miss Hattitude. "I must say, I could hardly resist your insistence, in that case. *Are you from Mars?*"

"I am from as strange a country," he proceeded. "To all intents and purposes, I am as much an alien to your civilization. It happens that I speak the same tongue; but in my land a man dares be himself, and most women, also. It is, if I remember rightly, 90,000,000 miles to the red planet —"

"It is nearer 140,000,000, at present," interrupted the lady.

"So be it. It is only 3500 miles to the Pacific. The ratio is no doubt inadequate, yet I am curious to know where you draw the line of conventionality. I am as anxious to make your acquaintance as any Martian could be, I assure you. We are total strangers to each other,



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but, by your own admission, that should encourage rather than deny acquaintance. It seems to me that the less you know of me, the more anxious you should be to make friends with me. I assert my originality. I swear I am unlike any man you have ever met before. By a parity of reasoning, I am eligible. If I am not a gentleman, I have at least frankness, unconventionality, and courage. Does such an amicable alliance disturb your ideas of decorum? Think for yourself, I beg of you. Tell me any reason why you should fear me."

"I am afraid I am already compromised," confessed the girl, overbalanced by his torrential rhetoric. "I feel sure that your logic is mere casuistry, yet it carries you so far afield, I can't help being amused at your fallacy. The manners of the West must be more interesting than I have been taught. Yet you say you are unique —"

"My point of view is almost Japanese in its incongruity, but I hold to the Romantic aspect of life. I was taught in a good school to regard every woman as a dramatic possibility."

"You touch me on a sensitive nerve," said Miss Hattitude, "and again I must respond reflexively. If you are indeed of the extraordinary sensitiveness of the Japanese — if you can see life as the color prints show it, without sharps or flats, as I might say, then you are indeed worth knowing. I have spent many months in this very building seeking to understand their conception of art."

"It is simple," said Braghampton. "I feel, rather than understand, the method. It is entirely a question of composition. If you hold a frame before any collection of objects, it must become pure pattern. Conventionalize this, place it in its true position with regard, not to the environ-



A FLIRTATION IN COPLEY SQUARE

ment, but to the frame, and you have motive, composition, design. It is thus that I regard you; I hold up my frame and disconnect you from your surroundings of Boston haughtiness and conventionality. You are an intricate and interesting study. You have line, color, and *notan*. It is thus that the man from Mars would perceive you. He would miss the accidental shadows of tradition and establishment, he would see you yourself, disfranchized from Society, a person. In that lay all my audacity. The affront, if any, was offered to your family, set, position — you yourself escaped the impertinence.”

“The Japanese are undoubtedly a hundred years ahead of us in their conception of Art,” said Miss Hattitude. “Am I to infer then that your system is equally advanced? But you contravene Emerson, however, for does he not say ✓ that when one separates any object from the connection of things and contemplates it alone, it becomes at once comic?”

“I refer you to Korin,” said Roulhac Braghampton, “but, were I to quote your own sage, I might say that you, at least, have not answered his own definition of the comic — ‘frustrated expectation.’”

“I verily believe you *are* from Mars,” Miss Hattitude exclaimed. “At least I cannot hear the hinges of the Golden Gate creak in your conversation!”

“I am from Nowhere,” was the reply, “and if you will accompany me to my home for the afternoon, I will present to you the freedom of the city!”

“I have committed myself,” bewailed Miss Hattitude. “You have been too agile. I will reward you. We shall walk, not to Nowhere, but as far as the Leif Ericson statue, and from there you may take me home. But



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you will think me as little a Bostonian as you are a San Franciscan."

"I hope to convince you that you, on the contrary, belong Everywhere," said the youth, as he crossed the street with her.

Chapter Five

MISS MISCHIEF'S MEDIUMSHIP

One fit of our own mirth, and then we are for you.

(The Bloody Brother.)



O a person of Roulhac Braghampton's temper, all was fish that came to the net. In his amatory duellos with members of the passive sex, he was, as the challenger, always willing to leave to his opponent the choice of weapons, and these he flourished with a natural dexterity that usually brought him victory. Having trapped Miss Hattitude's guard, he lost no time in forcing home the point of his charge, and she soon cried, "*touché.*" Needless to say, however, it was not so much Hetty Hattitude's heart that was touched as her head, and, as Roulhac felt, that was the more to his credit. Her appeal, in short, had been from Philip drunk to Philip sober, and the inconsequential trifler hardly knew himself in the new part.

The acquaintance with the Stencills was also maintained, although Roberta's pose was one of steady disapproval. She found the rogue ingenuous and entertaining, but, her first trust having gone astray, she treated him with scant favor. Mortimer, on the other hand, gave the young man his frank sympathy, swallowing his shameless recitals with the appetite of one who has to act all his most romantic and fanciful adventures in the back attic of




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his own brain. Mr. Stencil was very much in love with his wife, but what he might have been, had he not married, he knew well; and it was the devil-and-all, to be sure!

And where did Roulhac Braghampton's money come from? He himself proclaimed that it was a rich aunt who provided his revenue, and that it was her whim for her nephew to enjoy himself. "Do anything you like," he said she said, "except be commonplace and respectable. Behold, I send you forth as an emissary of gayety to the nations. Let it be your task to amuse the world, and paint this drab Universe a second coat more vivid and jocose. Here be too few fools to go round, what with the emancipation of women and hygienic underwear! The world needs an occasional laugh as much as any other remedy, and do you divert the Philistine and Bohemian alike!" The vivacious old lady, according to his legend, died of laughter, after dreaming that she was trying to tie a cannon-ball to a log with six shoestrings.

His income, at any rate, enabled Roulhac to put on a good front in Society, and lined with gold his misfit manners. He endured an ordeal at dinner with Herod Hattitude, Esq., and family with an easy grace and with a certain distinction. He did, to be sure, warn the children never to put chewing-gum in the stew, nor idly stuff cheese in their ears, but he himself neither ate his soup with a sponge nor called too loudly for butter in his tea. He once absent-mindedly took his knife to the folded and starched napkins, cutting the leaves of linen as if the serviette had been a pamphlet, but from such solecisms as this he could recover himself easily and drown the blunder in a jest. His language was slangy, or, let us say, poetic; but it was never ungrammatical. When his lips were unstoppered



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of the plug of propriety, he used his native tongue with the abandon of Ben Jonson, and his tropes budded and flowered with equatorial profusion.

To Hetty Hattitude the young man was, indeed, from another sphere, and she took a sharp relish in his piquant personality. He was not one to be "taken up" or she would have produced him at the houses of her friends. It is needless to say that he did not make her acquainted with his mission in Boston, and she gave her relatives to understand that Mr. Braghampton was a gentleman who, to pass away the time, was dallying through courses in the Harvard Medical School.

This was his status when, one morning in April, Roulhac was discovered by a small bluish envelope containing a note in a bold ultra-feminine hand, signed Hetetia Hattitude. It ran, at the rate of about six words to the page, as follows :

"If you have nothing to do this afternoon, my dear Mr. Braghampton, I would be very glad to have you accompany me to a meeting or séance which may prove sufficiently interesting to keep you awake. Please come, or answer before eight o'clock."

Roulhac had already done a turn or two in maddest Boston. He had succeeded in obtaining an invitation to the Thursday Evening Club, and he had listened to excruciating papers on "Tendencies," of sorts, at the Twentieth Century. The Visionists were gone, but Mr. Braghampton was invited to the Wassail Club, a society of Boston's most timorously radical, which had arisen from the remains of the older association. His initiation had been completed with storms of applause and




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floods of beer, and, having so successfully fulfilled the ordeal in the Italian restaurant affected by these precocious disciples of the Decadence, he made friends with the Grand Prior of the Order of the White Rose, and strutted, talking wildly of Bonnie Prince Charlie, of the Restoration and of the glorious virtues of the House of Stuart, drinking to His Most Gracious Majesty the King "over the water" — the King who should come by his own again, thanks to the efforts of the Clan — into the last degree of Anglomania, that of the feather-headed Jacobites of New England. He signed the telegram sent to Don Carlos upon the birthday of that picturesque pretender, and was even now anticipating a decoration — who knows but a title? — from the rightful King of Spain and the Two Americas. From this sublime height of fancy the drop to the Author's Club had landed him in the Commonplace, but he exchanged the epigrammatists of the one for the abolitionists, type-worn heroes, and pretty poetesses of the other with a good grace.

He hardly looked, then, for great sensations at the promised séance, but he had determined never to miss an opportunity for investigating the intellectual mazes of Boston's immemorial activity. He despatched a messenger to warn Miss Hattitude of his compliance, whistled his way, to the tune of "The Rose that All are Praising," into a long black coat, painted the cracks in his patent leather shoes with India ink, and set out for the West End, willing enough to meet his "Perfecto," as he already called her, though but slightly intrigued with the prospect of psychic adventure.

The house to which Hetty took him was upon West Cedar Street. It was a three-story brick structure, flat and prim upon the sidewalk, of an old-fashioned plan, with



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a sloping slate roof and two small dormers thereon. They opened the storm door and went up into the porch stairway to a white door upon which was a nicked plate bearing the inscription, "T. Gray."

The two visitors were admitted and went upstairs into a front parlor with long mirrors and red velvet furniture, originally of good make and design, but reupholstered in horrid taste and woolly fringe. Here they found Mrs. Burlap filling the apartment with patronage. Mr. Braghampton was introduced to the Queen of Boston, and she gave him two fingers of a black glove. Beside her Mrs. Essery loomed, as if she had been built in the room and was waiting to be created.

"If I am not mistaken," began Mrs. Burlap, "we are to witness some interesting developments, Mr. Braghampton. The young lady who is to play the medium is an amateur, and she has never given séances in public. We are waiting only for the President of the Society for Psychical Research, so as to have the affair witnessed in proper form. The room has been accurately measured, the carpet has been inspected, and we are to have flash-light photographs taken of the place. We go at these things scientifically in Boston, you know. We are too near the Twentieth Century to investigate psychical phenomena in any hit-or-miss spirit. There is no knowing what may come of this. I intend to write a report of the proceedings myself, whatever happens. You understand, of course, that in the study of modern mysticism what does *not* happen is of as much importance as what *does* happen. We must compile statistics and collate all the information that is obtainable. We have learned much from séances that, to the lay mind, would appear to be entirely unsuccessful. We are computing aver-



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ages and attempting to prove the possibilities and chances of extra-natural manifestations all along the line. I have sent out over four thousand return postal-cards requesting answers upon the subject of "Semi-Nudity in Dream" — a very suggestive field for research, I assure you. If you will be kind enough to give me your address, I shall be glad to send you one, and have you fill out the answers to the questions at your leisure."

"I shall be charmed," was Mr. Braghampton's reply. "But could you tell me who is to be the medium?"

"It is a Miss Mischief, an Englishwoman, I believe; someone that Miss Hattitude discovered. The remarkable part of her manifestations is that she does not believe in them herself. She maintains that they are all rubbish — fancy! *rubbish!* I take that as a better indication of sincerity than even the measuring of the room; though that, of course, if we are to proceed scientifically, is absolutely necessary. But here she comes, now."

Roulhac Braghampton looked up as the folding doors opened and the medium entered. Her coming drew the other eyes also, and they did not see the expression that came over the young man's face. He was, for the moment, quite off his guard, and the figure appeared like an apparition. It was as if he had drawn first prize in a lottery when he looked and saw this lady in blue cloth, this lady with the warm red hair coiled over her brow, smiling, equal to the occasion, superb of poise, fragrant with gentility, radiating an engaging personality. It was the woman of his dream, she who had bedeviled him in California, whom he had seen, known, loved, and followed through a whole winter's delirious escapades. It was Kitty Carmine, it was Cicely Fex, it was the Countess Rouge, it was Ce-





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lestine Jewburg — still in blue, still with her eyes of lambent ardor, winsome, electric, compelling!

Her glance traveled quickly around the room until it met that of Roulhac, who sat trepid and entranced. Then quickly she tossed her eyes upward to the ceiling and down again.

It was a sign and warning. It was a part of their old code, one of a set of secret messages she had taught him when they ran together on the great hypnotic hunt in San Francisco. It meant "Do not recognize me!" and he obeyed as of old. But his hands were clenched and he trembled as if a cold wave had struck him.

She was introduced to the company, which now numbered almost a dozen persons, including the President of the Society for Psychological Research with his notebooks and foot rule. And then, seating herself in an armchair, Lady Méchante laid her right hand to her eyes and remained quiescent.

The room was hushed and seemed full of floating wings. The President looked at his watch and set down the hour and minute. Mrs. Burlap silently drew off her glove and counted the number of gas jets, collecting data for her report. Miss Hattitude took the scene more easily, with no professional duties to complicate her observation; yet, as a woman, she could not help noting the costume of Miss Mischief, and balancing, mentally, its faults and successes. Roulhac was in a stupor of astonishment, yet he braced himself, knowing that what was to come might well need his assistance.

"It is very dark," came in measured tones from the lips of Miss Mischief. "It is dark, with rolling clouds. I am being borne upward and outward, and the globe recedes. It

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is cold, as cold as Labrador. Someone is calling me— ‘Phryko! Phryko!’ It is very dark. Now it is lighter, with a warm red light. It is the moon; it is a red, round rolling moon, cut all criss-cross with little lanes. I see more clouds. I am falling, falling, falling!”

Suddenly she sat up, with her eyes open and staring at the wall. “*Ow mu nishoram!*” she cried aloud, and then she laughed. “What funny people!” she said, as if to herself. “They have three legs! See! They are talking with their toes!” Then she stood up and spoke with the grand air, “Yes, I am Phryko!”

She took a step forward, unsteadily, as if she too had three legs and was a bit unused to managing them. She made a strange gesture with her head, as if she were rubbing out a chalk mark with her chin. Mrs. Burlap and the President looked with all their eyes.

The President had trained himself to write without watching the paper. He could write in the dark, write inside his pocket, write on top of his head. He needed all these accomplishments in his business, for ghosts give no favors to the unprepared.

As for Roulhac, he could make no method out of this gibberish, but he knew that his heroine was not the person to act aimlessly.

Her next move was to clasp her forehead with her hand and call hysterically for a pencil. The President was, of course, prepared, and overjoyed at the prospect of securing documentary evidence from the somnambulist, which he might be able to have reproduced and printed in the Report of the Society. He handed her an extra pencil and leaned over her shoulder anxiously, as she wrote a line of strange characters.



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She continued with the rude sketches of queer three-legged animals, their noses in the air, and under the whole she wrote:

“Ow mu nisboram. Pbyko.”

There was much more dumb show of the same sort, a mouthful or so of her outlandish gobble, a weird gesture, and then the clouds came back, she rose, pierced the dark, beheld another sphere, and fell with all the symptoms of extreme nausea. All, that is, save one. Then she opened her eyes in a babyfied stare and smiled at the company.

“Where am I?” she said. “Why are you all looking at me so queerly? What have I been saying?”

After drinking a glass of water she shook her hands to bring the blood back to her fingers and smiled again.

The audience, fascinated at the pantomime, now broke into a babbling chorus, and Mrs. Burlap and the President began exchanging notes.

“I forgot to take her pulse and her temperature,” he said, “but it was very remarkable, very. Most extraordinary. A most susceptible and delicate medium. A most interesting case. Most interesting. Very different. Very. This séance, I think, Mrs. Burlap, can hardly be classed with any of the three hundred and fifty-three we have investigated. I must say I am at a loss what to make of it. Glossalalia, too! Ah, that is rare good fortune. Pronounced type of glossalalia. I shall carefully analyze her words and the diagrams. Singular, very. Very singular, *indeed!*”

Mrs. Burlap had been lost in thought, posed like Michael Angelo's David. She turned and replied: “It certainly is a most interesting case, as you say. I have no doubt but that it will prove to be of transcendent importance.



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into the dark and cold. The cold of Space! What else, indeed? Then there was a warm red light—a new sphere—she thought it was the moon, but was it not cut into little channels? Then the strange new language, the grotesque inhabitants, with their tripedal anatomy and novel gestures. Was there ever anything plainer? Can you come to any other possible conclusion? Why, my dear girl, you are a celebrity; this séance is epoch-making! Who knows—who knows but that through you the most marvelous truths ever known shall be revealed!”

“But I don’t understand,” said Miss Mischief, with her hand to her brow in a puzzled gesture. “What is it? What have I done?”

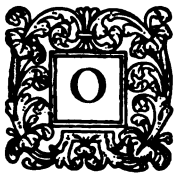
“Done!” cried Mrs. Burlap, “*done?* You have visited Mars! You have talked the Martian tongue! You have drawn a picture of the inhabitants of the mysterious planet!”

For the fraction of a second Roulhac fancied he saw a rebellious smile struggling behind his friend’s eyes, attempting to control her expression. Then an innocent gaze of juvenile bewilderment filled them, and turned on the illumination of incandescent innocence.

Chapter Six

ENT'RACTE

Is this your wench? You'll find her a sharp mistress.
(The Lover's Progress.)



ON the afternoon following the séance, Roulhac Braghampton called at West Cedar Street. He was admitted by a gentleman in a frock-coat and a colored shirt. This being's hair was parted extravagantly on one side, in the manner affected by cheap barbers; his lower lip fell away from the upper and disappeared where his chin should have been. He had beady black eyes, a half-inch too close together, and his figure was constantly drooping from the erectness with which he endeavored to hold himself. He took Roulhac's card, read it, and then left him in a small dining-room by the door.

After a few minutes' wait the portière was raised and in stepped a lady like an elfin sprite, smiling and 'fantastic in a blue kimono tied with a gay red sash. She went up to her caller, kissed him upon the forehead, and dropped to a seat beside him upon the haircloth sofa. Then she cast down her eyes and protruded a very small silk sandal beneath her robe.

Roulhac looked her up and down, with what reproach he could summon to his eyes, and said, gloomily, "Well, and who are you now?"

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“Miss Madelaine Mischief, at your service!” was the reply.

“And what has become of the Countess Rouge?” he demanded.

“You murdered her with your insistence,” said the lady.

“And Cicely Fex, and Kitty Carmine, and all the rest?” he said.

“Poisoned,” she replied, “by your love. Poor Peanut! Can you not understand that I am made for love but not for loving? You frightened me. You are too inflammable; I feared an explosion.”

“I love you, yes,” said the young man. “Heaven help me!”

“Oh, some other woman is more likely to do *that*,” said Miss Mischief. “You have a good constitution, and it will be easily amended.”

“Have I followed you three thousand five hundred miles to hear you taunt me like this?” inquired the unfortunate youth.

“You have not followed me, for I came the other way. I have been playing horse with the court of Korea. The Emperor used to jump off his throne to shake hands before I got through with him. Then I studied with the Mahatmas of India and went to Persia to put the followers of the Bab through a course of enlightenment. No, you have n’t followed *me*, my dear! If you had n’t broken, you might have been leading the cotillion with me yet, but you complicated things. I can’t bear philandering. *Now* will you be good!”

“You shall not fob me off with your highfalutin,” cried Roulhac. “You blow hot and blow cold; you will and you won’t! Wherever you have been, I have found you



ENT'RACTE

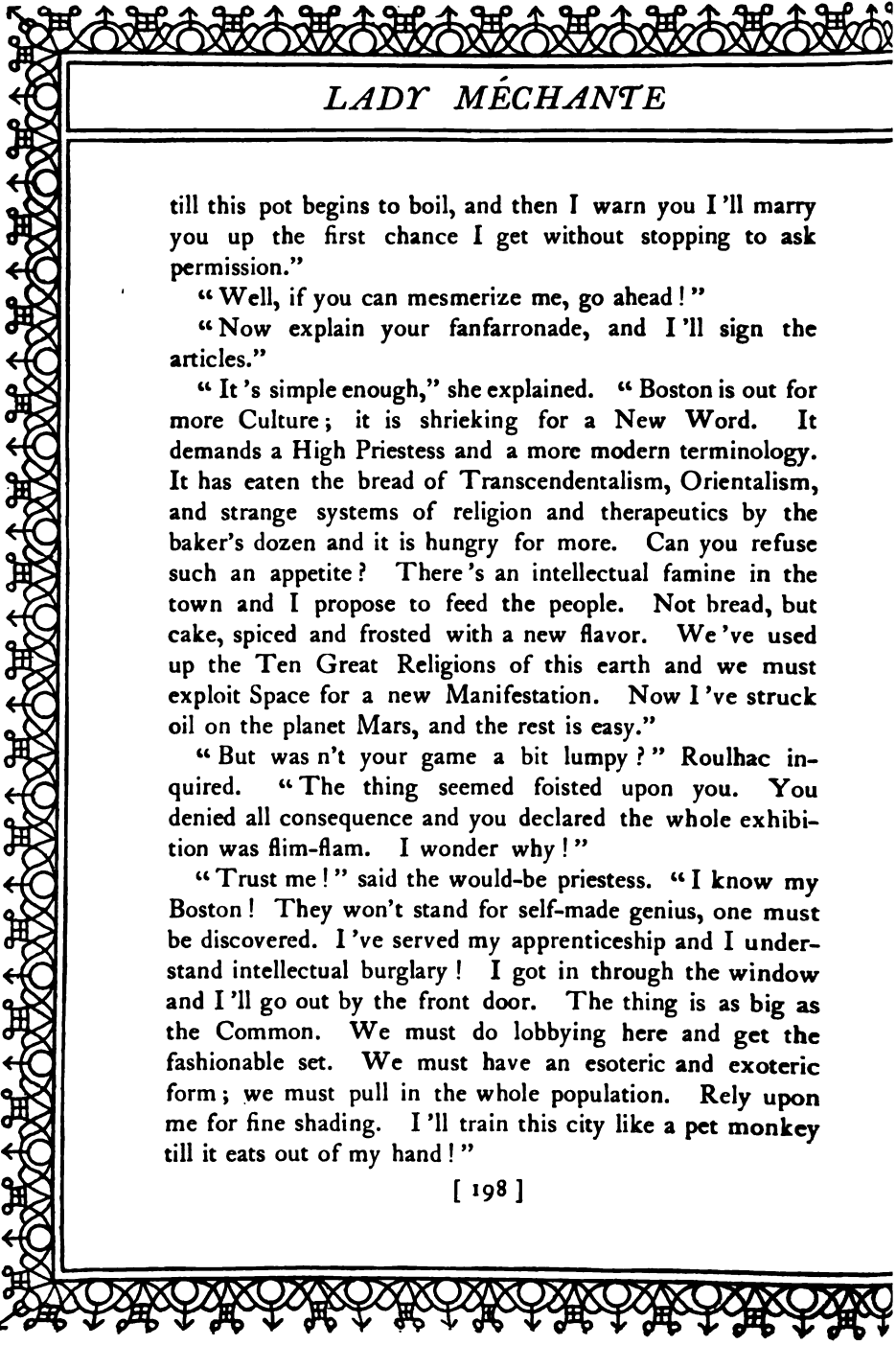
and tagged you, and you're 'it.' I love you so hard it hurts when I breathe."

"The light is in your eyes, my dear, I dazzle you," she said, softly. "Would you clip my wings and cage me? Where would I have been now if I had married you, for I presume you speak of marriage or its equivalent? I have no time for that. Here in Boston is a field so fertile that we have but to drop in a seed of mirth and it shall increase an hundred fold. The town is wonderful, wonderful! My word, I thought San Francisco to be the veritable Midway Plaisance of the continent, but this city is a madhouse; the place is already hypnotized and we need but give it the proper suggestion. Ah, dear, would you sober me before my time and make me sign the pledge? Can you see me in a checked apron, frying steak and potatoes? I am cooking a bigger pie than that, my Peanut, and all of white blackbirds. When the pie is opened, they will sing, I warrant you!"

"Whatever you are up to," said Roulhac, "can we not do it as well together, and married?"

"No. I have tried that twice and I shall never forget the attempt. My second husband was a burglar, but not even that most romantic of professions could preserve the illusion. And I must keep my ideals. I would regard you as a mere possibility. You, as a pencil sketch, as a promise, are interesting. Finished and inked in, you would be a bore. In three words, I refuse you. Now make your scene and have it over. Or, if you will, embark with me in the shallop of nonsense and navigate the stormy seas of gayety."

"I'm thirsty for you and I want to drink. There's too much froth on your beer. But I'll wait a while longer,



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till this pot begins to boil, and then I warn you I'll marry you up the first chance I get without stopping to ask permission."

"Well, if you can mesmerize me, go ahead!"

"Now explain your fanfarronade, and I'll sign the articles."

"It's simple enough," she explained. "Boston is out for more Culture; it is shrieking for a New Word. It demands a High Priestess and a more modern terminology. It has eaten the bread of Transcendentalism, Orientalism, and strange systems of religion and therapeutics by the baker's dozen and it is hungry for more. Can you refuse such an appetite? There's an intellectual famine in the town and I propose to feed the people. Not bread, but cake, spiced and frosted with a new flavor. We've used up the Ten Great Religions of this earth and we must exploit Space for a new Manifestation. Now I've struck oil on the planet Mars, and the rest is easy."

"But was n't your game a bit lumpy?" Roulhac inquired. "The thing seemed foisted upon you. You denied all consequence and you declared the whole exhibition was flim-flam. I wonder why!"

"Trust me!" said the would-be priestess. "I know my Boston! They won't stand for self-made genius, one must be discovered. I've served my apprenticeship and I understand intellectual burglary! I got in through the window and I'll go out by the front door. The thing is as big as the Common. We must do lobbying here and get the fashionable set. We must have an esoteric and exoteric form; we must pull in the whole population. Rely upon me for fine shading. I'll train this city like a pet monkey till it eats out of my hand!"



ENT' RACTE

“One more thing, first, then,” said Roulhac. “Who is this chap with the head made out of a cocoanut, who let me in at the door? I’m your leading man, or I don’t go on the stage. That man with his mouth open and the fingers like Frankfurters is a new one on me! I don’t like the taste of him.”

“The idea! Afraid of that stool-pigeon? Why, Guy Bounder’s in my kindergarten, and you’ve taken your degree!”

“My education is not completed till he’s lost, my Countess, and you can sew a button on that!” Roulhac tapped his foot.

“We need him in our business and we can’t do without him, but he can be shipped at a moment’s notice when the curtain goes down,” said the lady.

“Even as you dismissed me!” remarked Roulhac, bitterly.

“I promise you he’ll have an exit that will match that of the Barber’s Second Brother,” the arch-conspirator declared. “But there’s a man I need more than this apple-faced Cockney, and that’s a man with wit and imagination who can see the under side of a joke and show me the stitches. You’re willing, but you’re not up to these parlor tricks, dear boy. I know how it ought to be done, but my scientific education was neglected. There were several in the Hypnotic Club who were intelligent, but they each knew only one thing. What I want is a smatterer, a dilettante, someone who can varnish the game so as to bring out the high lights. Oh, I knew the man in London, who could give us a twist of the wrist to perfection. He was the only interesting man within the Four Mile Radius! I came across the Atlantic with him, too!”

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Roulhac stared. "Was he an actor?" he asked.

"He was, and a bad one, too. But he would have made a good ringmaster if he had n't been married."

"His name was Stencill!" cried Braghampton.

"*Sac à papier!*" ejaculated the lady in the kimono. "You know him?"

"And I know you! You are Lady Méchante!"

"Fifteen, too, fifteen four!" she replied, gayly. "Now for a run of eight! Where is he? We must have him, dead or alive! I'll put a price on his head; we need him!"

"But he is married," said Roulhac.

"Alas, yes," said Lady Méchante.

"And he is therefore impossible?" Roulhac insinuated.

"Alas, no!" was the reply. "He loves his wife, indeed, and I would that that put him out of the running. But though she is a wool-haired chit with eyeglasses, she is bent on having him amused. With a jealous woman there might be some spice to the game, but she is so sure of him that it spoils sport. Still, we must have him. He has a genius for the picturesque, except in his views of marriage; and perhaps, after all, that is picturesque nowadays. He has a memory, too, and he knows more impracticable flim-flam than enough. Why, he spent two years studying Volapük, simply because it could be of no earthly use to him whatever. He told me of the Bab before I went to Persia. He's an encyclopedia of useless information, and we must consult him. But you must see your partner first!" And she went to the stair and whistled.

In a moment Bounder entered, big in his frock-coat and waistcoat, bowing pompously. Lady Méchante introduced the two men.

"Guy," she said, "this gentleman is from San Francisco,



ENT'RACTE

and though he parts his hair in the middle, he is as pert a gambolier as ever put a town through its paces. He's to do the outside fancy work, post the bills, and hobnob the *élite*. You must be friends." To Roulhac, writhing under this description, she remarked: "Mr. Guy Bounder of London, and you can't deny he looks the part. He is cast for the heavy character work in costume. Turn your toes out, Guy, and straighten up! Mr. Bounder is to descend from the ruddy planet and agitate society."

"That's what I call Florrididdle," said Guy. "You can butter me all you like after the show. It's about time to talk business. My idea is, there's money in this, and that's my specialty. You two can have all the fun you want, but I'm for a System. What is there in it? That's what I want to know."

"We are in the land where dollars grow," said Lady Méchante. "Do you plant the trees, ay, and pick them. We take the flowers and you the golden fruit. I promised to make your fortune and I'll do it. Mr. Stencil will show us more ways than one."

"What, another?" Guy exclaimed. "I s'pose *he* parts his hair in the middle, too!"

"His wife parts it the way it suits her fancy," said Lady Méchante.

"I'll have a look at that wife," said Bounder.

"You'll be too busy learning to walk on three legs and studying Martian," was the countercheck.

"Oh, I *say!*" cried Guy. "They've got to pay me for that, I give you my word! I'm by way of being the clown in this circus, I know, but it's got to do me in something before I'm through! Little Guy is going to saw wood in this city."



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Roulhac, already disgusted at the Cockney's appearance, felt his gorge rise at the vulgarity of such mercenary motives. The tip given him by his Countess, however, reminded him that, whatever Guy Bounder was paid for his share of the conspiracy, it would not be too much for the ordeals he would have to suffer. To the artist in frivolity the whole scheme appeared in roseate colors, a slim naked joke which he and the fair Countess would deck in fantastic garb and set giggling in the streets of Boston, to dance widdershins through the town. But behind the plot they were incubating in council, crouched a plan that Roulhac confided to his heart alone. He had his idea. He would manœuver with the rest, twist the wiles and ruses of cunning to their ends, but watch his chance, countermine, and spring his own trap when the time came.

The confabulation ended with Bounder's dismissal to his studies of Martian idiom and manner, and the ex-leaders of the League of Dream parted with an agreed rendezvous.

That night Mortimer Stencill saw a pair of animated faces in a box at Keith's Theater. That night he discovered that the fuse had reached the gunpowder. That night a trio of triflers dined at the Restaurant Slavoni on Harrison Avenue, dancing through the anticipation of their hoax till the gunpowder ran out of the heels of their boots.

And that night Roberta Stencill, dozing over a novel by Mrs. Humphry Ward, did not hear the Warren Avenue door slam till nigh upon two o'clock.

Chapter Seven

THE MANIFESTATION OF PHRYKO

And breed a bubbu in the house, I am bappy.
(The Night Walker.)



OVE, O my story, now on swifter feet!
The spring is wound, the balance regulated;
let the wheels turn and the alarum strike
to awaken Boston to the Cult of Mars!
Lady Méchante, with a saucy ambitious
devil in her eye, Roulhac Braghampton with
the Abracadabra filling his mouth, that mouth the whilom
engine but for vaunts and kisses, Guy Bounder Esquire with
his well-conned lesson stuffed within his bulging skull,
and Mortimer Stencil now a mummer off the stage — all
were ready, with each a finger to the trigger, aiming at
Boston's brains, awaiting the signal to blow them sky high,
as high as Mars! The Muse of Nonsense be my guide,
and thou, O Momus, inspire my chronicle!

The second and third séances, following closely upon the first, were but variations and amplifications of Miss Mischief's primary state of somnambulism. She still denied credence in the interpretation Mrs. Burlap had put upon her manifestations, and that lady frothed with impatience at the lack of more definite messages. At the fourth meeting, however, Miss Mischief came boldly forth as an evangel and filled Mrs. Burlap's hopes to overflowing.




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It was a mixed gathering of society captains, reporters, skeptics, and the riff-raff of vacuous intellectuals that the last new word collects. The President of the Society for Psychological Research was there with eyeglasses, whiskers, and notebooks, sniffing for data for his report. It was to be Roulhac's *début*, and he waited a bit nervously for his cue. The séance-chamber had been moved, under Mortimer Stencill's direction, to an upper room with a skylight and dormer windows, and here the company assembled one evening in March.

The apartment was a spacious one, papered with wriggling stripes of blue forget-me-nots that climbed the walls in rows. The floor was bare, a fact that pleased the President mightily. Into the two dormers a haggard moon peeped, and shot a glance of lunacy at the already preposterous fancies of the gathering.

All eyes centred at a cabinet of black cambric, a circular curtain, rather, that depended from a corner of the ceiling, shutting off a portion of the room in the manner affected by the devotees of Spiritism. There was a table provided with pencil and paper for the medium, and all else was chairs; chairs and eager, apprehensive watchers sitting them with expectancy. With Roulhac Braghampton was a maid in brown, her eyes smouldering as she glanced secretly at her companion. Miss Hattitude was already alight; the young man from San Francisco had stimulated her curiosity at first, but with their more and more frequent meetings something more furious had awakened. It was as if she had been waiting many years for him and had but just caught sight of him on the horizon of her hopes, riding post-haste into her heart. Women, according to Hafiz, are creatures of inertia; once started, they go far and fast.



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But Roulhac was as yet unconscious of his capture; she seemed to him still emotionally inaccessible, and his mind was too full of Lady Méchante to perceive that the door to Hetty's heart was so slightly latched that one knock might open it.

At eight o'clock Miss Mischief entered in a costume that made the ladies start. It was of *peau de soie*, of a periwinkle blue, pervaded with graduated spots in the form of small silvery stars. The bodice, *zouave*-shape, was covered with string-colored lace, and there was a deeply-pointed corselet belt coming from a cleverly-tied bow on the bust, held in place by a quaint paste ornament. There was a delicate tracery of appliqué lace about the hips, and she wore soft kid slippers of a tender gray.

All this Hetty Hatitude saw, and Mrs. Burlap and Mrs. Essery saw also; but to Roulhac nothing was noticeable save two blue eyes pistoling him with delicious naughtiness, a swirl of hair the color of fire-lit smoke, and a mouth that tried to be mutely sedate, primly sober, tempted by a pair of impertinent dimples in her cheeks. He gazed at her with the intense fascination with which one regards a lighted fuse, awaiting the explosion.

The lights were lowered as she took her seat by the table, and the murmur of whispers ceased. The silence was suddenly punctured by two brisk raps on the ceiling.

The medium, her head sunk in her jeweled hands, seemed asleep. The knocks were repeated and she looked up, dreamily.

"Who is there?" she asked.

Rap by rap the word "Phryko" was spelled out in the universal code, and the table shuddered.

"It is the spirit Phryko," announced the medium, "and



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she wishes to communicate, through me. I must go into trance and she will take possession of my body and make her communication." So saying, she fetched a few groans and let her head drop upon the table.

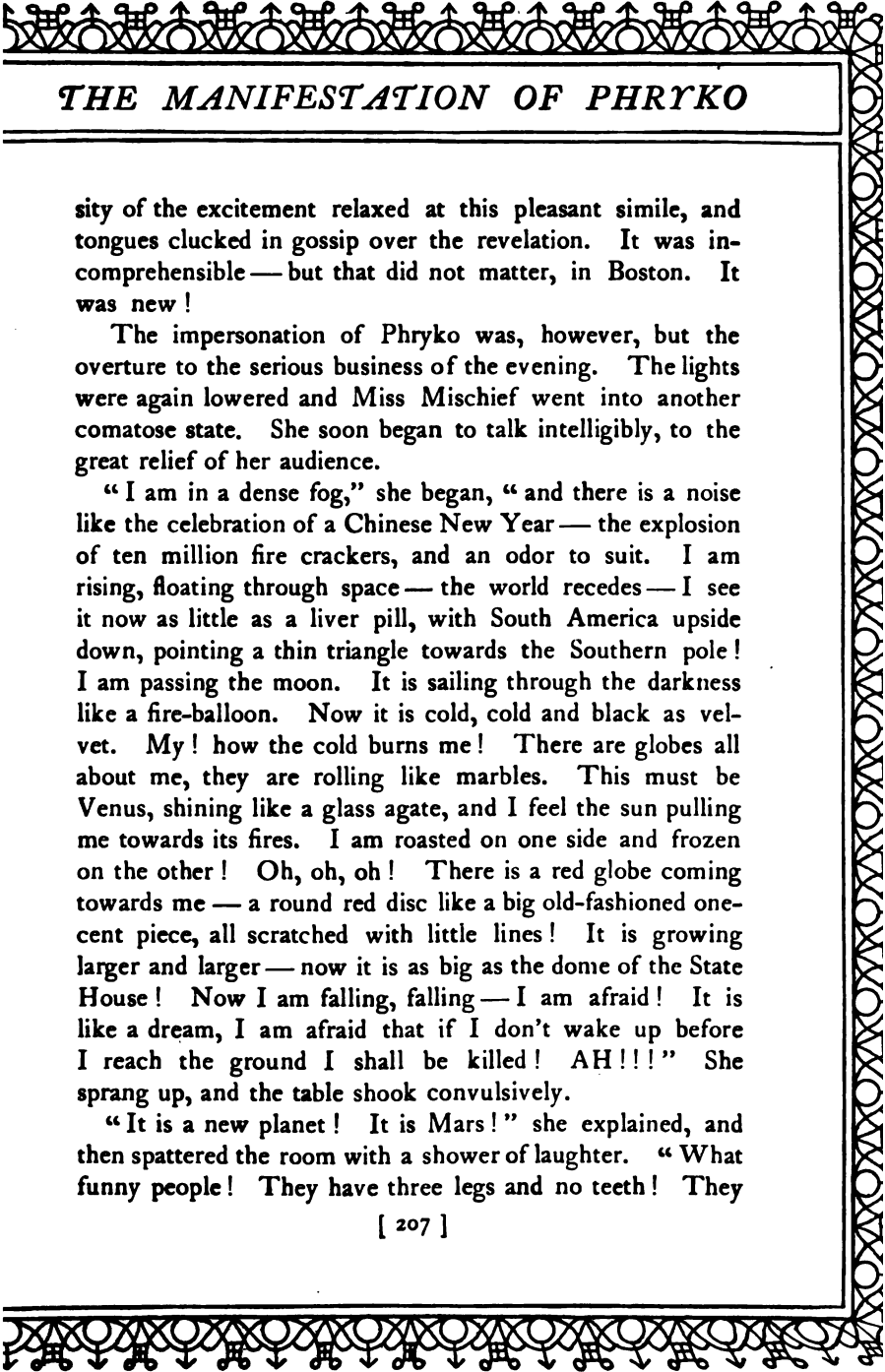
There was a pause of several moments, after which the lady's body began to writhe. It was as if someone were attempting to force a hand into a glove several sizes too small. Phryko was evidently a misfit for the svelte form of Miss Mischief. But at last the transmigration of souls was effected, and the spirit Phryko, ensconced in the flesh of this tender, kissable adventuress, equipped with the soft, rich cadences of Florizelle's voice, was prepared to give her message.

"O snurt in oro su ingnid!" she cried with rhetorical gestures of an unearthly intensity. *"Ow fi serim roo ingtow et stufinom uth ratirog nishsnipsod fai jelun! Di sith jessum! rappip roy sidnum rif thart, din willif slisnok fai Phryko din roy tenilpo lush dinif dirworif ut roo silp tsingmy uth sarfus!"*

The President of the Psychological Research Society, crouching by the window, made eager notes, penciling the words as well as he could in shorthand. It sounded to him like Esperanto, but he had no time now for speculation. He would strive with the syllables later. But in his haste to keep up with the words he had no time to insert vowel sounds. Well, if worst came to worse, he would fake them. No one would know.

This eloquent Jabberwocky achieved, the spirit Phryko seemed to recede, turning Miss Mischief almost inside-out in the withdrawal. The process was not too pleasant, but the lady at last revived somewhat and forced a smile.

"I do feel like a stick of barley-candy, that someone has sucked a pickled lime through!" she confessed. The ten-



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sity of the excitement relaxed at this pleasant simile, and tongues clucked in gossip over the revelation. It was incomprehensible — but that did not matter, in Boston. It was new!

The impersonation of Phryko was, however, but the overture to the serious business of the evening. The lights were again lowered and Miss Mischief went into another comatose state. She soon began to talk intelligibly, to the great relief of her audience.

“I am in a dense fog,” she began, “and there is a noise like the celebration of a Chinese New Year — the explosion of ten million fire crackers, and an odor to suit. I am rising, floating through space — the world recedes — I see it now as little as a liver pill, with South America upside down, pointing a thin triangle towards the Southern pole! I am passing the moon. It is sailing through the darkness like a fire-balloon. Now it is cold, cold and black as velvet. My! how the cold burns me! There are globes all about me, they are rolling like marbles. This must be Venus, shining like a glass agate, and I feel the sun pulling me towards its fires. I am roasted on one side and frozen on the other! Oh, oh, oh! There is a red globe coming towards me — a round red disc like a big old-fashioned one-cent piece, all scratched with little lines! It is growing larger and larger — now it is as big as the dome of the State House! Now I am falling, falling — I am afraid! It is like a dream, I am afraid that if I don’t wake up before I reach the ground I shall be killed! AH!!!” She sprang up, and the table shook convulsively.

“It is a new planet! It is Mars!” she explained, and then spattered the room with a shower of laughter. “What funny people! They have three legs and no teeth! They

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stand on their heads and wave their feet in the air! It is like a circus. Their faces are red — orange red, and they have no hair!”

It was as if she were describing a painting that she saw before her, and the President could not resist the temptation to address her. To him the description seemed unscientific. He desired verisimilitude. At such investigations naked Truth shocked him; it should be clothed in figures. So he interposed: “How large are they, these Martians? As large as I am, for instance? Somewhere, say, between five feet four and five feet seven?”

“Larger than you!” said the medium. “Larger and even more ugly! They are examining their thumbs, and one is separating them into groups. They are in a large hall, all hung in orange red.”


“This hall, how large is it?” said the President. “Is it round or square?”

“It is a large hall, about as big as a plot of ground, and it is a funny shape — the shape of a half-melted caramel,” she said.

The President writhed, but committed the information to his notebook.

The medium continued. “There is a large thing swinging, like a golden top, suspended by cords, queerly. It is marking diagrams on sheets of gold. Here, I will show you,” and she scrawled a curliing network of lines upon a paper. The President descended upon it like a hawk on the wing.

“They speak a strange language,” she continued. “It is like English spoken backward. And they roll, like pinwheels, upon their three legs and two arms. Now I am passing from the hall into the open country. It is flat and



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covered with rusty trees. There is a straight canyon, straight as a ruler, several miles wide, extending into the distance."

"These are the so-called 'canals,'" murmured Mrs. Burlap to Mrs. Essery, "only they should be several hundreds of miles wide. No doubt this is a secondary or tertiary system, too small for our telescopes to discover."

"I'd like to ask her if these beings are clothed or not," replied Mrs. Essery. "Do you know, I'm really afraid to know. There are disadvantages in having a mixed company of both sexes. We really ought to arrange for a private séance, Mrs. Burlap!"

"Nonsense!" cried the Queen of Boston. "It is a purely scientific investigation, and, after all, these Martians are not strictly human beings at all. We must regard them, in a way, as animals."

"But they are supposed to be of a higher order of intelligence than men, are they not?"

"I very much doubt it," said Mrs. Burlap, authoritatively. "The fact that they have three legs is against them. In the processes of evolution fewer and fewer members are needed as we go up in the scale. We are higher beings than quadrupeds, and the quadrupeds higher than sexiped insects. And so on. I would much prefer, myself, to hear that Martians have but one leg. It would be far more satisfactory."

During this colloquy Miss Mischief had described in detail several peculiarities of the vision. But, after some minutes of such talk, there was another spasm in Miss Mischief's frame like what had preceded the usurpation of her person by the mysterious Phryko. Again she struggled in paroxysms, and, as these cooled, she rose, with the

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same chin gesture, and taking a step forward fixed a glassy eye upon Roulhac Braghampton. Slowly she extended her hand, pointing at his nose, and cried aloud:

“*Oy ro Nishoram! Oy ro Nishoram! Kiwee! Kiwee!*”

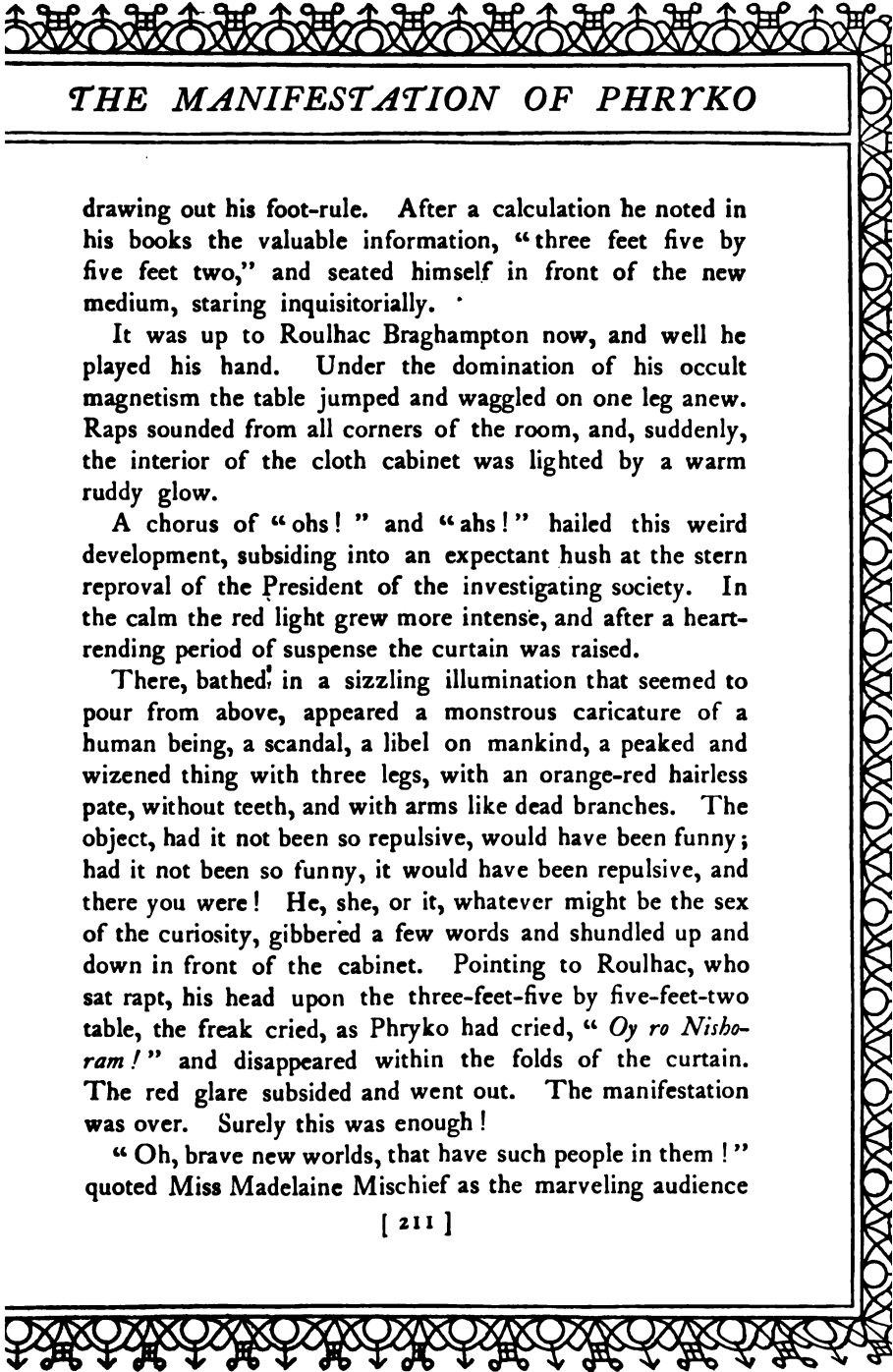
Then, fainting with emotion, she fell to the floor. She was assisted to her seat by the President, and attention was divided between her and the young man so sensationally introduced. He, in his turn, shuddered, and his fingers twitched nimbly. “What was it?” he said to his companion. “She looked through and through me. I seem to have awakened to some kind of a past consciousness. It is so strange, so terrible. There is a queer feeling in my legs, as if one were missing!” He looked, and assured himself that he was still a biped.

Miss Hattitude’s eyes bulged so with interest that her glasses would scarce remain in place. “Roulhac,” she whispered, “Roulhac! It is true! You *are* different! I always knew it, from the first! You seem, as you sit there, like a god or a prophet! Speak, and give us the tidings we long for!”

This excited appeal drew the attention of all. Mrs. Braxton-Burlap, polarized with the thrilling *dénouement*, came up and took his hand. Mrs. Essery raised her lorgnette and scanned him more calmly. The President bustled about him, like a fly on a window-pane.

“Take the seat there,” he insisted. “Let us see if you, too, have not a power over the manifestations of this strange sphere! You were clearly pointed out by Phryko as one of the Cognoscenti! I have it in my notes!” He drew the unwilling Braghampton to the chair by the table, and Miss Mischief, weak and tremulant, tottered to an armchair.

“Now wait till I measure the table,” said the President,



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drawing out his foot-rule. After a calculation he noted in his books the valuable information, "three feet five by five feet two," and seated himself in front of the new medium, staring inquisitorially.

It was up to Roulhac Braghampton now, and well he played his hand. Under the domination of his occult magnetism the table jumped and waggled on one leg anew. Raps sounded from all corners of the room, and, suddenly, the interior of the cloth cabinet was lighted by a warm ruddy glow.

A chorus of "ohs!" and "ahs!" hailed this weird development, subsiding into an expectant hush at the stern reproval of the President of the investigating society. In the calm the red light grew more intense, and after a heart-rending period of suspense the curtain was raised.

There, bathed in a sizzling illumination that seemed to pour from above, appeared a monstrous caricature of a human being, a scandal, a libel on mankind, a peaked and wizened thing with three legs, with an orange-red hairless pate, without teeth, and with arms like dead branches. The object, had it not been so repulsive, would have been funny; had it not been so funny, it would have been repulsive, and there you were! He, she, or it, whatever might be the sex of the curiosity, gibbered a few words and shuddled up and down in front of the cabinet. Pointing to Roulhac, who sat rapt, his head upon the three-feet-five by five-feet-two table, the freak cried, as Phryko had cried, "*Oy ro Nishoram!*" and disappeared within the folds of the curtain. The red glare subsided and went out. The manifestation was over. Surely this was enough!

"Oh, brave new worlds, that have such people in them!" quoted Miss Madelaine Mischief as the marveling audience

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curdled into groups. "Ah yes, now I am convinced! Were there nothing but my own foolish babblings to assert the mysteries, I would have none of them. But that Mr. Braghampton has shared with me the power seems too much for my doubts. Yes, I am the Manifestation, the Light! Through me shall men hear and know. Phryko herself has crowned me high priestess! Now I shall found my cult and establish my creed and code. I shall raise up a church, a temple of Mars, and you shall be my disciples. Go forth then, and publish the tidings from every house-top. It is the New Dispensation! What boots the telescope, the spectroscope, and all the other toys and tools of the materialists? It is not in this way we shall know Truth! No 42-inch objective shall reveal what I have seen — the knowledge must come through psychic sources — through the channels of intuition!"

"Ah, but if we only had a key to those pregnant Martian syllables," murmured Mrs. Burlap.

"Fear not," said the medium; "all shall be revealed."

"Fear not," said the President of the Society for Psychical Research; "I shall reveal it myself. Intuition is all very well in a way, but Science must supplement these extra-natural phenomena. Mr. Braghampton, would you kindly give me a few particulars necessary to complete all the data respecting this most extraordinary occasion? It is of the greatest consequence that we proceed in a scientific spirit. What size collar do you wear, now? And what did you have for breakfast? Have you ever seen a ghost before? And if not, why not?"

Absorbed in these portentous details, the President did not find time to turn his attention to the examination of the cabinet with its curtain which swayed suspiciously as



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the Martian disappeared. It did not occur to him to notice that the fabric completely enclosed the skylight in the ceiling, nor that from above a draught of night air still agitated the folds of the canopy.

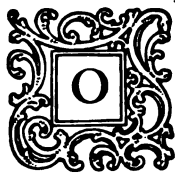
To Miss Hattitude the evening loomed big with prophecy. She had found her hero. She had long cherished the belief that Boston held no man worthy her worship, and, to her, love and worship were one. She had sought in New York, in Chicago, and as far West as the Mississippi for a demigod without success. The thought had grown in her mind that indeed she was too good for any human being alive, and, thus prepared, she embraced the glorious prospect of an interplanetary alliance. Still, she was relieved to know that Mr. Roulhac Braghampton, whatever might be his proper physical condition upon his native planet, did not, in this incarnation, have three legs!

Chapter Eight

THE INTERPLANETARY PLAN

Tell your lady-mistress she has shot up a sweet mushroom!

(Thierry and Theodoret.)



ON Mrs. Burlap, arbiter of Boston's culture, the revelations of the séance laid hold like an immense octopus with the tentacles of tremendous tidings. She writhed in prophecy, but the devil-fish enshrouded her in a sepia mist of mystery. She would have been glad to become the oracle of the new manifestation, to hold this ingenuous simple-minded Miss Mischief in patronizing control, to preserve the philosophy for the polite elect and keep the herd at bay; but to keep back such dynamic news was something like attempting to conceal a lighted sky-rocket. Miss Mischief was a teaspoonful of wildfire of which some dozen enthusiasts had tasted, and already they began themselves to burst into flames. Who could combat such an appetite? Not this amiable gryphon, this proper caryatid, staggering under the weight of Society.

The daily papers with a *flair* for a new sensation, wormed their way into ken of the miracle, and it soon transpired in hint and gossip till, atop the general interest and curiosity, sprang the printed report of the President of the Society for

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Psychical Research. It was copied in every Boston newspaper and discussed by laborers, cab-drivers, and millionaires alike. The interest centred about the speech of the materialized Phryko, and more than one Professor at Harvard College sat up in his wrapper and slippers endeavoring to be the first to interpret the message. But the illuminating ray was to come from an unexpected quarter.

It will be remembered that the President, in transcribing the words phonetically, according to Ben Pitman's immortal system of shorthand, had omitted the vowels. What he had to publish, then, was a series of groups of consonants, running something like this :

“ O Snrt n r s ngnd w f srm r ngtw t stfnm th
rtrg nshsnpsd f jln D sth jsm . . . rppp r sdnm rf
thrt dn wlf slsnk f Phryko dn r tnlp lsh dnf drwrf t r slp
tsngm th srfs.”

Two days after the publication of this cypher, a letter appeared in the Boston Transcript announcing the fact that a translation had been achieved in the following manner. The consonants in each group were reversed, and upon this, as a skeleton, vowels were inserted experimentally until a modicum of sense had proved the efficacy of the method.

For instance, the first sentence so reversed read : “ O, T r n s — n — r — s — d n ng.” With the proper vowels added, this was transposed into the startling announcement, “ T(e)rr(e)n(e)s, (a) n(ew) (E)r(a) (i)s d(aw)n(i)ng !” Proceeding thus with the whole speech, it was found to continue as follows :

“ We of Mars are waiting to manifest the Greater Dispensation of Knowledge. Heed this message ! Prepare your minds for the Truth and follow the counsels of



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Phryko, and your planet shall bound forward to a higher place amongst the spheres!"

In the same way Phryko's wild *cri-du-cœur*, when pointing to Roulhac Braghampton, "*Oy ro Nishoram! Kiwee!*" was easily translated, "You are a Martian! Awake!"

The effect of this discovery, which was attributable to Mr. Mortimer Stencill, an actor doing a supper-turn at Keith's Theater, was tremendous. Séance followed séance till the room on West Cedar Street was inadequate to provide accommodations for the seekers after extra-planetary truth. For a while Mrs. Braxton-Burlap viséed the applications for seats, but upon the removal to a hall the control of the cult escaped her, and, though she was still one of the chief disciples, the tone of the fellowship was never afterward of the quality she could quite approve. The earlier days were patronized by select assemblies, but as soon as the news of a new faith was bruited abroad, cranks and eccentrics of all orders hastened to renounce their former metaphysical allegiance and swell the congregation that already had begun to attend the lectures of the Illuminati.

With the discovery of the translation of the Martian tongue the public interest increased a thousand fold. Line upon line, precept upon precept, a Martian Science, Religion, and Philosophy was made known through the mediumship of Miss Madelaine Mischief, by the thaumaturgic Phryko. The bitter verdict of astronomers that life under human conditions was impossible upon the planet Mars, that the planet possessed neither water nor atmosphere, that the so-called land and water surfaces as shown upon Shiaparelli's maps were such in name only, that the variation of the polar caps could be caused by the melting of nothing less volatile than carbon dioxide, that the "canals" were in



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all probability but huge fissures in the outer skin of the red globe, caused by the expansion of the inner nucleus, or perhaps but mere visual aberrations, — all and sundry scientific pedantries were overthrown by the apodictical asseverations of the incarnated High Priestess now vouchsafed to the men of Earth. The cult grew, and a campaign of education was inaugurated as the data warranted creed, dogma, and formula for the new sect.

Roulhac Braghampton, had he been but one-eighth the hot-headed enthusiast that he was, could not have helped being drawn into the maelstrom. The apostrophe of Phryko had brought him of a sudden to the center of the stage, and the gathering audience looked to him as an intermediary between the ecstatic mediumship of Miss Mischief and humankind. The theory became prevalent that he himself was the product of a prenatal metempsychosis, and that, incubating in his subliminal self, was the teleological explanation of the relation betwixt the two spheres. It was only a matter of the proper development, and, in time under the promptings of Phryko, this subconsciousness would come to the surface and offer the practical explanation of the unification of the worlds. In the popular parlance, he was a Terrene, but he held deep hidden in his soul a Martian consciousness that would soon make known its secret.

Hetty Hattitude was red-hot and smoking with hero-worship, and the most eager of the eager Martian cult. With Mrs. Braxton-Burlap she made the tour of Boston Society and brought every laggard into the fold. The pent-up enthusiasm could hardly find escape in the knowledge that trickled through the seeress — the demand was constant for more Truth, more definite facts, and, above all, for a ritual and a terminology. To satisfy this craving,



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Mortimer Stencill, working behind the scenes, toiled long and late.

And so, at last, was organized the First Temple of Mars. With Miss Mischief as High Priestess, and Roulhac Braghampton as a kind of archdeacon or precentor, the services were begun in the Mechanics Pavilion, and the congregation took its part in the adoration of the red sphere. Capital for the erection of a fitting edifice had been easily subscribed by influential citizens vaunting Boston's paramount claim for recognition as the initiator of every truly modern movement; and soon upon a lot hard by the Public Library, a site that had been held jealously for some most worthy purpose, the building was erected.

It was of red brick, and in its design Mortimer Stencill had had free hand and had given his fancy the rein. Circular in plan and triangular in elevation, the pile rose, a huge cone pointing to the zenith. About its middle a stone torus bore this inspiring inscription in the Martian tongue:

“SOME THINGS THOUGH SEEMINGLY INCONSEQUENT IN THEIR IMMEDIATE ENVIRONMENT YET INDUBITABLY BEAR AN OBSCURE CORRELATION TO THE VAST PRINCIPLES OF TRANSCENDENTAL HARMONY.”

The central hall was circular, and from the middle of its ceiling hung a compound pendulum, swinging in harmonic curves traced by a golden inverted cone. Above, a conical chamber was devoted to the use of the High Priestess; it was lined with red marble and furnished with



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sumptuous taste. Here Madelaine Mischief received the initiates, or administered to acolytes the higher degrees of Martian Science. It was decorated with texts inspired by the superhuman Phryko, and contained a large stained glass window showing the high priestess holding a red globe.

The fad raged for a while unchecked by a reaction, but it was, like all great movements, destined to pass through three great epochs. First, then, it was greeted with the ridicule of the materialists—the gibes of the man in the street. The papers lampooned the cult unmercifully and published bogus messages from Mercury, Saturn, and Venus. The Martian cocktail was retailed over the Parker House bar, and red hair and whiskers received the slangy obloquy of the gamin. Three-legged stools, or camera tripods, were dubbed “Martian mules.” The hog-latin of the adolescent was parodied as Martian idiom, and so the wind of derision raged. Through all this era the cult clung to its creed with the strength of a masterful minority. The devotees told each other that, after all, these materialistic facts were but the outward and visible signs of the new truth. The manifestations had a kernel of virtue only to be cracked by deep study of the letter of the message. Members of the Cult of Mars boasted to the incredulous that their doctrines had an esoteric significance undreamed of by the scoffers.

Next came the epoch of persecution. The sect grew more and more powerful, and the conventional beliefs at last began to recognize in it a rival. The churches rose against this weird unearthly creed and sowed their tracts abroad. Science came out in lecture and magazine article to prove the illogical basis of its pretended revelations, and finally the Law was aroused and bestirred itself in opposition to the alarming machinations of the inspired quartette.

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This last enemy was the most powerful threat; and the cabal held many counsels in order to protect itself against the danger.

But, meanwhile, several divisions of the work had been made, which it is necessary to treat in detail. Miss Mischief had organized the exploitation of the Martian cult with consummate executive ability. Roulhac she appointed her chief lieutenant and suffragan; through him were held all communications with the congregation of believers. He was, in fact, a bureau of publicity, the barker outside the side-show of this strange sect. Upon Mr. Stencill fell the invention of the material accessories and the machinery of the science, while Guy Bounder was entrusted with the creation and maintenance of an exchequer.

To keep Mrs. Stencill out of the conspiracy was, of course, impossible. Miss Mischief knew more than to try. It was, in fact, her perennial despair that Roberta proved so complaisant. Bitter jealousy would have been more easy to combat. The wife of the actor encouraged him in the game to the top of his bent, and seconded with hilarity his endeavors for the advancement of the cult. Nevertheless she was a woman, and therefore a victim of mixed motives. She had her eye on young Braghampton and watched her chance to undo him. The affair with the two Pompadours had awakened a lively desire to defeat him in whatever love affair he happened to be engaged, and, irrational and fantastic as was that impulse, it was always with her. She played up to her husband, then, seconding his capacity for elaborate gaming with a lively imagination.

Mortimer had dabbled, as Miss Mischief had said, in all corners of science; his was a most curious lore. He had sought first for some striking and convincing peg upon



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which to hang his system, and hunted long for the *clou* to the exposition of Irrational Science. He discarded the doctrine of Hyperspace as too abstruse and technical. He bethought himself of the modern affectations of the cult of Color-Bores — those who trace color in sound, in word, and even in letters. But this was too easy. It was like inventing dreams, and it would disgust the intelligent.

The hint came at last when, one day, he chanced to drive a splinter into his thumb. In removing it his attention was called to the capillary markings upon the ball of his finger, and here he saw his opportunity. It was so simple! It was so applicable to permutation! By these capillary markings, differing in each hand, but divisible into categories, all mankind could be classified. He set about the analysis. He pored over reports of the Chinese methods of identification of criminals by thumb-prints; he faithfully went through Bertillon's exhaustive reports and Galton's system of classification. These data proved enormously valuable, and he tabulated the possible variations under the three great heads: Arches, Whorls, and Loops. He assigned varying attributes to Tented and Forked Arches, to Loops Nascent, Invaded, and Crested, to Spiral Whorls and Circlets, to Rings Duplex and Banded, and dissected them into Eyelets, Rods, Staples, and Cores, according to their elementary nuclei.

Here was a terminology already made to his hand, and it was adopted by the cabal with whoops of enthusiasm. Roulhac found upon the ball of his own thumb the Circlet-Whorl of the High Order of Mars, Miss Mischief bore the immortal Banded Duplex Spiral, but Guy was marked with the stigmatic evidence of the Invaded Loop. The key to this cryptographic revelation was soon mastered by the High



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Priestess, and the divination of caste by the Martian Mark of the Thumb became a part of the Primary Initiation.

The compound or twin-elliptic pendulum heretofore described was a pretty extension of the idea. If a weight, suspended from a cord attached to the bottom of a V-shaped loop, is permitted to swing with a rotary motion, it will describe what is known as a harmonic curve, varying according to the proportions of the parts of the pendulum. To trace similarities between these mysterious curves and the lines on the thumb was easy, but pregnant with meaning. The dimensions of the proper pendulum for any particular marking gave significant numbers by which were figured the fatal dates and destinies of the subject. One more invention, however, might be described. In the circumference of the circular audience hall was set a huge organ. Not the gaudy mass of painted tubes to be found in the church terrestrial was this, however; its machinery shot forth pure color instead of sound. Mr. Stencill had calculated the analogy between vibrations of sound and light waves, and had constructed his scale of color to correspond with the notes of the staff. The keys of his instrument touched, there flashed forth upon a black screen rays of colored light, in solo or chord, varying as music varies in tone, from hue to hue. Waves of tender green burned into red, blues and purples melted into orange and yellow with soft gradations or triumphant metamorphoses. Lights flickered like driftwood fires, violet, rose, and opal, and swept in waves to the more virile tones of the spectrum. Through smoky harmonies of brown broke melodies of heliotrope and pink. Minor nuances in gray and mauve changed into major exultant combinations of primary color. The effect was inspiring and superb as a summer sunset. It was Heaven

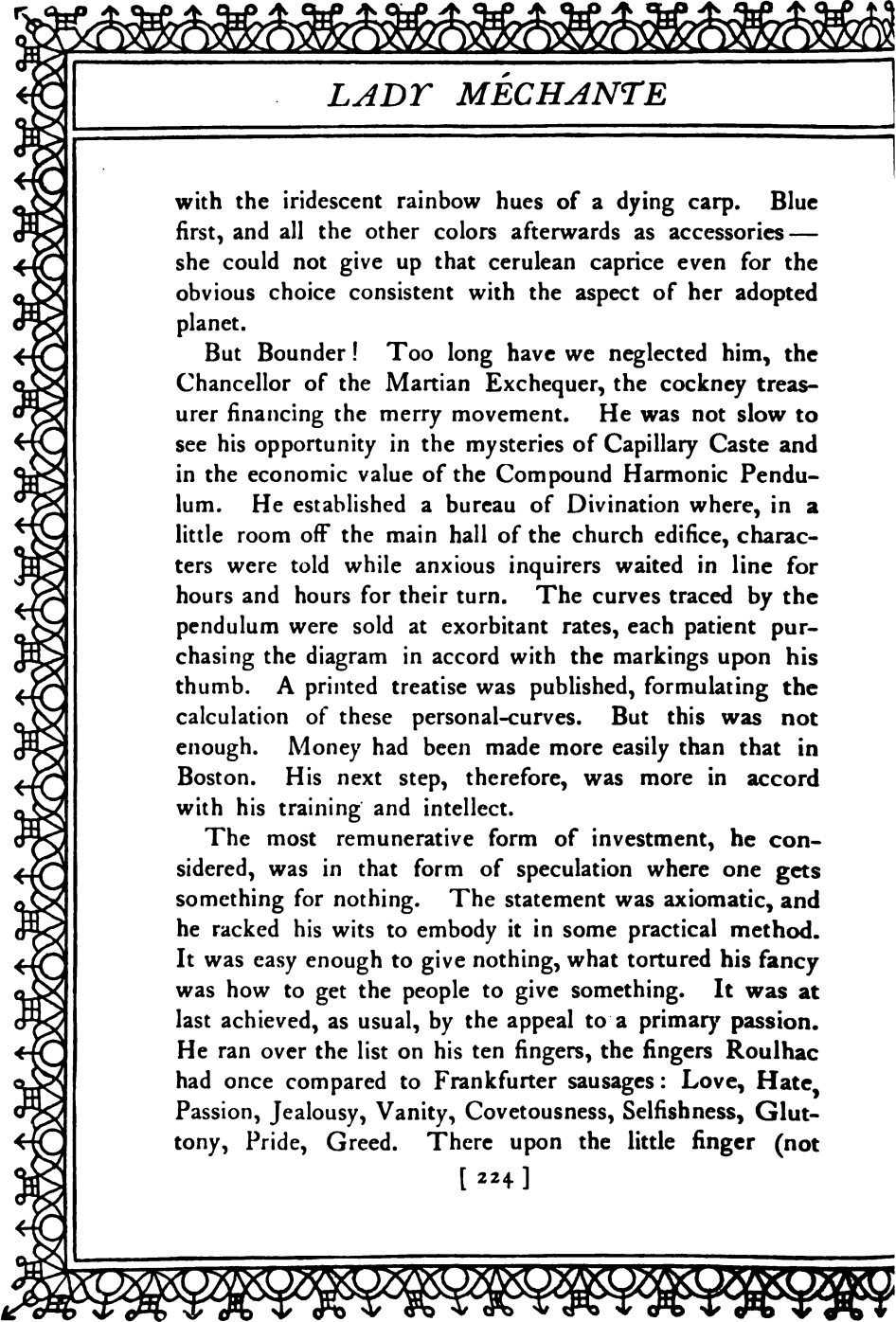


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grown visible, the glory of the Lord made manifest. And such, said Phryko, was Martian music.

These are but examples of Mortimer Stencill's ingenuity. There was more, much more. His mind, thrown into this work, blossomed with genius, and invention after invention bewildered the anxious inquirers after the wonderful truths of his Martian Science. In the sanctum of the High Priestess, half was laboratory and half boudoir. Here were the super-scientific instruments that gauged the spirit, intellect, and morals of the initiate. Delicate, sensitive, and precise, these wonderful apparatuses could measure the minutest heart-throb, the quaternary thrill of passion, the faintest yearning, the tiniest desire. Here was the Telepathoscope, a cunning contrivance of golden springs and lissome levers — the first inheritance from Mars of that higher civilization which the red planet, twenty-five millions of years ahead of the earth in development, revealed to terrestrial use. Here was the Circumspectroscope that could analyze fact and assay the ore of thought, transmuting it into its quantum of abstract Truth. Here was the Intelligraph, transmitting thought by a subtle and direct process from mind to paper. Here was the Cardiometer, registering affection, love, passion, ecstasy, in degrees upon a dial.

And here, too, of equal interest to the spectator, were the artful tools of Miss Mischief's human affairs; hair brushes, all in gold, diamond-set combs, lacquered powder boxes, caskets of vermeil and bistre, phials of belladonna, and a thousand more dainty instruments ministering to the equally important offices of the High Priestess. Ah, she was no such half-wit as to neglect the outward and visible signs of divinity! It was not in her theory of reform that the hair must be short and the gown ill-fitting. She flashed



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with the iridescent rainbow hues of a dying carp. Blue first, and all the other colors afterwards as accessories — she could not give up that cerulean caprice even for the obvious choice consistent with the aspect of her adopted planet.

But Bounder! Too long have we neglected him, the Chancellor of the Martian Exchequer, the cockney treasurer financing the merry movement. He was not slow to see his opportunity in the mysteries of Capillary Caste and in the economic value of the Compound Harmonic Pendulum. He established a bureau of Divination where, in a little room off the main hall of the church edifice, characters were told while anxious inquirers waited in line for hours and hours for their turn. The curves traced by the pendulum were sold at exorbitant rates, each patient purchasing the diagram in accord with the markings upon his thumb. A printed treatise was published, formulating the calculation of these personal-curves. But this was not enough. Money had been made more easily than that in Boston. His next step, therefore, was more in accord with his training and intellect.

The most remunerative form of investment, he considered, was in that form of speculation where one gets something for nothing. The statement was axiomatic, and he racked his wits to embody it in some practical method. It was easy enough to give nothing, what tortured his fancy was how to get the people to give something. It was at last achieved, as usual, by the appeal to a primary passion. He ran over the list on his ten fingers, the fingers Roulhac had once compared to Frankfurter sausages: Love, Hate, Passion, Jealousy, Vanity, Covetousness, Selfishness, Gluttony, Pride, Greed. There upon the little finger (not



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so little, either) of his left hand he found the reagent for transmuting nothing into something.

The new cult had not, as yet, formulated the precise principles of its code. Speculations were rife. It was known that Roulhac Braghampton and Miss Mischief were engaged in the translation of Martian messages, that before long the newer Bible, the book of modern revelation, would be given to the world. Guy Bounder's mind, sly and sinuous, must anticipate the code — he must, of his own initiative, spring a sensation and reap the reward before his authority could be contravened. He toiled in secret, therefore, and perfected his scheme in the dark. He made clandestine trips to a printer's shop, and one fine morning when the arch-conspirators were absent he sprung his mine. A huge sign in his office announced in staring letters that :

“ Licences to steal will be issued by the High Priestess of Mars, under the Authority of the Spirit Phryko. Prices as follows :

Permission to steal, from values \$1 to \$100	\$1.00
from \$100 to \$1000	\$5.00
from \$1000 to \$1,000,000	\$50.00

These licence-certificates must be kept secret upon pain of abrogation of penalty.”

The response was immediate and active. The first morning Guy Bounder's idea netted him \$5500. He cautioned each buyer to say nothing either of the offer or of the transaction, and he succeeded in keeping the news of the business from becoming known to his principals for several weeks. The effect of this enormous increase in his revenues was to make him supremely satisfied with his share of the plot. Most of his reward was stored, either in solid or in liquid form, beneath his plaid waistcoat. He strutted,

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now, like a turkey gobbler crammed with vanity, swollen with an inflamed conceit. He smiled to himself at the child's play that contented his partners.

So much for the subordinates; upon the High Priestess and her lieutenant, Braghampton, was laid a far more important task. It was their part to perpetrate the propaganda of the faith, to formulate the ritual, to establish the cult complete with creed, dogma, theology, cosmogony, philosophy, and metaphysic. For this there must be some definite text to be placed in the hands of the believers, some book so suggestive, so irrational, so verbose, so ambiguous and obscure that it might be interpreted as meaning everything, anything, or nothing. It must follow the precedent of religious development; it must be divinely inspired — that was easy, for Phryko had been hailed with acclamation by the multitude as one of a higher intelligence — it must create a new terminology, if only by the mere writing of common nouns with initial capital letters. Above all, it must be long enough, new enough, to sell for five dollars a volume. But it had come to pass in Boston that Truth, All-in-All, and Mind had already been over-capitalized — they must discover some new territory of the emotions.

Night after night, after the fatiguing work of séancing in the new church, after the royal Martian robes had been laid off, and the money from the collections counted, Roulhac Braghampton and Lady Méchante toiled over the literary task, dictating, revising, amending and emending the manuscript. Chapter after chapter, part after part, his arm about her waist and her head on his shoulder, the two traveled with their Apocalypse — the Martian Book of Bosh.

Chapter Nine

THE BOOK OF BOSH

How her brain coins!

(Two Noble Kinsmen.)



AID Roulhac to Miss Mischief one morning several weeks after their final lucubration: "I dreamed that I was trying to keep a horde of savages at bay, with a 22-caliber revolver which shot pink balloons!" "It was prophetic," replied the lady. "Some such work is indeed before us. Let me interpret the dream for you. The savages are the members of the Great and General Court of Massachusetts, and the pink balloons are texts from the Book of Bosh, 'being the apodictic revelation of Martian Science now first vouchsafed to Terrenes by the Spirit Phryko, Daughter of the Fire,' as our sub-title hath it!"

"But what have we to do with the Legislature?" he queried.

"Are you so soon satisfied?" she said cynically. "Have you then reached the limit of your ambition? Why, Bounder himself has higher ideals! Bounder, by the way, is up to something queer—I confess I can't quite make him out."

"Heaven hates a hog," said the young man from the West. "We have stayed with the game in good style,

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and we've played nothing but blue chips. But I'm hungry for San Francisco again. Lordy, but that town is frothy! There's about as much excitement in this place as you could find in a clam fritter. It's too easy! All bluffs are called on Kearney Street, but everything goes here. I hate to bet on a sure thing. I long for the old days when the sun shone on all sides of the house, when we were n't lorgnetted to death when we went outdoors and did n't have our pictures in the papers. I'm for a quiet life and no awning and yellow carpet down the front steps!"

"Don't try to seduce me, for I'm implacable," said Miss Mischief. "We must raise the limit. I have my idea, and it's not half accomplished yet. The town and country are aroused; they've stood for Martian Science, and they're keen on Metaphysics. But we need a brass band for our procession — we must attack the legislature. We want a charter, we want licence to practice and to give degrees; we want immunity from taxation for the cult. We want an investigation and appropriation for official communication with Mars. And we're going to get it!"

"What it is?" cried Roulhac, wildly. "What it is that which it is, which it is what?"

"Here's my petition to the Great and General Court. We shall present it, secure a hearing, and make speeches. We shall impress the Representatives from Hull and Duxbury, and I shall wear blue — a gown of pale blue bice-color and we shall preach the Gospel of the Fire. Bounder shall give a materialization, and Martian Science shall sweep across New England like a cyclone!" Miss Mischief smiled at the chandelier.



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“And then?” stammered Roulhac.

“And then,” she said, with an 18-carat smile, “and then — you shall marry the High Priestess as the Book of Bosh has foretold! *Tara-ra!*”

Braghampton jumped up and made for her. “Do you mean it?” he cried.

She spun out of his grasp and hopped to the seat of a chair as if she had caught sight of a mouse, shaking a finger at his ardor. “I mean it! The Children of the Fire be my witness! But don’t count your kisses before they are snatched!” she added.

Roulhac helped her down from her perch with trembling arms. “You’ve laid me on the table for the last time,” he said. “The next time you’re going to be passed by acclamation. We’ll have a three-ply wedding with extras, sure! But I feel like an old tin can with the tomatoes emptied out. It’s too good to be true! I never thought I’d be proposed to, outside the female ward of an insane asylum! Have I taken a drink about seventeen sizes too large for me or what? By the thumping plush pile-driver of Cheops, I’m as silly as the square root of minus one! I could roar like a bull of Bashan. My Countess, next month we’ll write our letters on asbestos!”

But Miss Mischief, like Alice’s snail, replied “Too far, too far!” and gave a look askance. Said she thanked Braghampton kindly, but she could n’t join the dance — would n’t, could n’t, could n’t, would n’t, would n’t, could n’t join the dance — until the hearing was over. And so he departed, backing out of the door for a last languishing look at her and, encountering Hetty Hattitude on the corner, escorted her enthusiastically across the Common to Huyler’s for an ice-cream soda.

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Upon Mrs. Essery and Mrs. Burlap now fell the task of petitioning the Legislature and arranging for the Committee's reception. Every February for fourteen years they had gone up to the State House to attend the hearing given the claimants and opposers of women's suffrage; and like moral war-horses they scented the approaching battle with dilated nostrils. It would be a gala day for Boston's advanced thinkers, and they booted and spurred themselves with New Thought. What was Osteopathy to the magnificent promises of this great transcendental movement? What was Single Tax, Mental Science, Bahiism, Vivekananda, Prentice Mulford, Cuban Independence, Anti-imperialism, Roman Catholic Parochial Schools, Psychotherapy, Tenement House Reform, Sociology, Graft, Frenzied Finance, the Hygienic Dangers of Slates in the Public Schools, the Vedantic Philosophy, the regulation of the microbe-laden Kiss and the Gypsy Moth, the Index Expurgatorius of the Public Library, or the preservation of Boston Common to this — Heaven's last, best gift — the Communication with Mars? The nation should hear from it! Boston should once again set the intellectual pace for these United States. It was a new Revolution; it was a stroke for the Union of the Spheres; it was Abolition of Mental Slavery.

So Mrs. Burlap said, and so Mrs. Essery said also, shaking the feathery antennæ in her bonnet over the teacups of Trimount. In a thousand women's clubs the movement was discussed, and resolution after resolution reinforced the Cult of Mars. Mrs. Burlap showed the capillary Looped Spiral on the palm of her thumb to the scoffers; reply was impossible.

The day was set, late in June. The joint Committee,



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including the Representatives from Kingston, Hingham, Northfield, Hull (as it happened), Charlemont, and Peru, arrayed themselves in frock-coats, pared their nails with the four-bladed "Congress" knives which on the opening day they had found upon their desks, and struggled into white ties. Perspiration poured from their faces at the thought of the encounter with the operose women they must face, but they assumed masks of wisdom and twirled their thumbs or busied their fingers with their rolled-gold watch-chains. Every man crossed his right leg over his left knee except the member from Peru, who crossed his left leg over his right knee. It was an omen.

The room was full and rustling with sibilant gossip. In the corridors an ill-tempered crush of partisans strove like commuters for the gangway to the door. Well in front of those seated was Miss Mischief in a daringly sensational costume of pale blue and amber. Beside her, Roulhac Braghampton surveyed the gathering, and from time to time raised his patent-leather shoes to prevent injury to their polish. Ever and again, too, his gaze sprang to a window beside the members of the Committee, rested there a moment in anxiety, and fell away.

The chairman, he of Kingston, rose and called the meeting to order in a few embarrassed phrases and opened the discussion. The petitioners were first to be heard from, and Miss Mischief arose, walked to the front by the rail, and opened a red book — the now famous Book of Bosh. In the silence which followed five of the Representatives recrossed their legs and smoothed their beards.

"In supporting the petition for a charter, license and appropriation for the Temple of Mars," began Miss Mischief, "it is no doubt fitting that I, through whom this new



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Science was first manifested, should open the discussion. I need not tell your Committee of the wonderful growth of Martian Science, nor how its Truth, sweeping in wildfire over the hearts of men, has flooded them with the waters of Life abounding, raising up clouds of prayer in the midst of the dry sands of Doubt. I invented Martian Science and founded the First Temple of Mars three months ago next Wednesday. For years the Lords of the Sphere have been fitting me for the final revelation of the absolute Principle of the Gospel of the Fire.

“The importance of this movement is so transcendent, so far-reaching, that we have, I am sure, but to describe its aims to secure from your Committee the recognition due its importance. It is fitting that Massachusetts should be the first to welcome and abet a Truth so illuminating. We ask you, then, to report in favor of our petition that we may keep the wolves in sheep’s clothing from preying upon our pearls, clogging the wheels of Martian Science.

“But what is this creed? For those of you who have not become acquainted already with the glorious tidings of our Martian Apocalypse let me describe in brief the new revelation of Cosmogony, Theology, and Philosophy vouchsafed to terrestrial mortals by the Lords of the Third Sphere.

“There is not one god, but many, comprising a hierarchy of divinities increasing in Omnipotence, Omnipresence, and Omniscience to the uttermost confines of Space. For each System there is one God, with his circle of lesser Planetary divinities. The One God of the Solar System abides in the Sun, which is not fire as we understand it, but a mass of celestial magnetism generated by the love of purified spirits, radiating their ineffable effulgence upon the



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members of the family of planets. Incarnation into the Sun is only attained after learning the Secret of the Fire, which is imparted to each planet in turn by the planet next nearest the Sun, and it is by them passed on to the next planet away, and so the flame of Truth passes from sphere to sphere till all the Sons and Daughters of the Fire are purified. Thus the children of Mercury have learned the Secret of the Fire from the Celestials dwelling in the Sun. They have passed the Secret after millions of years to the inhabitants of Venus, who in their turn have made it known to Mars. The time has now come when the flame of Truth passes from Mars to Terra, and we are becoming awakened to the knowledge of that manifestation. We have had signs and tokens, but we have misconstrued them wildly. All the so-called phenomena of Spiritism are but the endeavors of Martians to make known to us the Secret of the Fire. It is an age of Materialism upon the Earth, but already we see the promise of a dawn of Psychic intelligence. It is through the soul, and not through the telescope, that we shall have news of the Third planet which men call Mars. It is already in the air. Men talk of this red sphere with hope and prophecy. The time is at hand; and in the Temple of Mars is the Truth already made manifest. The tidings are revealed! In my hand I hold the letter of the Word. Let me read, then, what says the incarnated Phryko, Daughter of the Martian Fire, in her message to Terrenes :

“ And in the One Sphere there is a Fire and the Fire is Red. Yet do purified spirits dwell therein and the One God. For the Fire burns not nor doth it consume, but is of the Spirit of Love. From the One Sphere speedeth Light and Heat Celestial to the



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Seven Spheres, that the Children of the Fire may be raised up and become purified. . . .

“For there be Children of the Fire raised up to their God on each Sphere to pass into the Celestial Fire. From Flame to Flame passeth the Fire from the One God to Each God. To the First Sphere the First Flame and to the Second Sphere the Second Flame. But to the First Sphere shall the Flame pass from the One Sphere. And from the First Sphere to the Second Sphere and from the Second Sphere to the Third Sphere shall the Flame of the Fire pass till Children of the Fire are raised up in the Seven Spheres.

“Now from the First Sphere to the Second Sphere hath the Flame passed, and from the Second Sphere to the Third Sphere also. And upon the Three Spheres Children of the Fire are raised up and are Purified.

“Now Flameth the Fire from the Third to the Fourth Sphere ; wherefore rise up, O Children of the Fire, that ye may know Truth.

“So saith the Book of BOSH, divinely inspired by the Daughter of the Fire, by name PHRYKO, through my mediumship! My conclusions were reached by allowing the evidences of this revelation to multiply with mathematical certainty, and the lesser demonstration to prove the greater. That is, my discovery that the Secret of the Fire was passed from Sphere to Sphere set my mind to work in new channels and led to my demonstration of the proposition that Desire is Red ; that all real Being is in Desire, that Life, Truth, and Love are Red, and that the opposite of Truth, called Error, Sin, Sickness, Disease, and Death are Blue, arise from mere Intellect rather than from Desire, the Verity of Redness.”

She paused, and a whisper went around the room. Bonnets nodded, and bald heads bowed. The five Committee-



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men, semi-comatose with the abstractions of this whirling metaphysic, tugged at their rolled-gold watch-chains and tried to keep themselves awake. It was at the tip of Roulhac's tongue to entreat her to brevity, for the minute-hand of his watch told of the speedy coming of a wonder. But she proceeded :

“Color is the Heart of Being. Fire is the embodiment, of which God or Desire is the Soul. Theorizing about man's development from mushrooms to monkeys and from monkeys into men amounts to nothing in the right direction, and very much in the wrong. Spirit can form no real link in this supposed chain of material Being; the stimulation of Desire is the only development in the Soul History of the Race. All apparent Phenomena are but the manifestations of gross Mind or Intellect. All is, to the Martian, pure Red. To those who perfect their Desires, all is Red also. So I have clad myself in Red as High Priestess of the Fire. To the groveling brains of the materialists it would appear another color, but to you, who are nearly purified, it must appear at least a delicate Orange or Citrus.”

The Committeemen stared with all their eyes. To them, indeed, the gown that Miss Mischief wore seemed pale sky-blue, but they dared not acknowledge it, one to the other. In the audience the devotees spoke in undertones, affirming the hue of the skirt; it was indubitably red to them, though some felt a gash of pain at the apparent ascendancy of their brutal intellects. Miss Mischief again opened the Book of Bosh and began to read aloud, when she was rudely interrupted by a whacking blow at the window-pane that startled the Committee into a change of legs. Braghampton rushed to the window and threw up the sash.

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More raps fell upon the ceiling and walls, and with a fierce cry in the Martian tongue, a being appeared outside the window, dangling in the air.

It descended slowly, laboriously, as if in great pain. Now it set three feet upon the sill, and now it bounded in and capered upon the floor of the assembly hall, in full view of the Committee, the Petitioners, and the Remonstrants, who, banded together in a sulky group at one side of the chamber, had been impatiently awaiting the end of the High Priestess's harangue.

Bedight in a harlequin attire of orange-red, with three half-naked legs and skinny arms of the same bloody hue, bald-headed and without visible means of mastication, leering and gibbering, the Martian envoy to the Great and General Court of Massachusetts pranced and rolled along the rail in front of the Committee and spat out mouthfuls of fire at every revolution. He paused for a moment with a gesture of his chin and looked at Roulhac. The young man from San Francisco sprang to the rostrum.

"Gentlemen of the Committee," he cried, "what more need we say to prove the overwhelming importance of this petition? Behold here in your very midst the proof of our claims! Here, in visible embodiment is a messenger from the Third Sphere which men call Mars. And behold he is very Red. Let me interrogate him, that he may confirm the tidings of Phryko!"

From the Martian's mouth appeared forks of red flame. His bloodshot eyes roved, and he moved ever nearer the door.

Suddenly from the back of the hall rose a cry of rage. "Fake! Fake!" roared a voice, and springing to his feet and pushing women down in his vehemence, a man came bellowing up the crowded aisle. He was dark, with a blue shadow



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across his unshaved chin, horridly haggard, hispid with rage and menace. He spoke with a weird Slavonic dialect and brandished a fierce fist over the heads of the assembly. "Fake! Fake!" he cried again and again.

"Barowich!" screamed Miss Mischief.

Roulhac turned; and then with a cry in Martian to the three-legged creature cowering by the rail, he started to intercept the progress of the mysterious malcontent. The Martian, whinnying with terror, blowing flames and smoke from his writhing mouth, forced his way towards the door. The crowd made a slim way for him, though the contingent of remonstrants, chortling with fury, rose *en masse* and struggled to head him off.

Roulhac and Barowich met in the center of the room and closed in a mighty struggle. The Committeemen, now thoroughly awake, jumped up and elbowed their way towards the *mélée* in the corridor. The chairman, he from Kingston, led the way with an oath, shrieking for the populace to arrest the intruder, the three-legged miserable, who now, tearing at coats and mantles, swiping off hats and bonnets, clutching skirts and trousers, tore his way through the press and raced up the corridor.

With a throaty sob of frenzy, the crowd of spectators plunged after the fugitive, headed by the Member from Kingston, yelling to heaven for the Sergeant-at-Arms. Past the central hall, where are exhibited the colors taken in the Civil War, past marble statue and bronze tablet, flew this human comet, with the Martian, like a fiercely burning star at its head, with a riot of frightened females in his wake, and a hurtling conglomeration of combatants overwhelming them. A trail of veils, belts, purses, and hats



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marked the passage of this whirlwind. Down the tessellated corridor, up the broad stairs, it passed.

The Senate was in session. A member from Duxbury had arisen and had just begun to read his maiden effort. It was entitled "An Act to Amend an Act to Regulate the Propagation of Clams and Quahogs in Plymouth Bay and Vicinity." He had but begun to attain his presence of mind, after floundering in the verbiage of the first clause of his bill, when the green swinging doors of the Senate Chamber were flung violently open. In an instant the chamber was flooded with a surging sea of agonized humanity, swarming through the narrow opening, flying the ragged colors of Tatterdermalia. A short length ahead of this rabble flew a shocking form, running, rolling, stumbling on three legs, one of which seemed palsied with his haste. This atrocious object hurdled members' desks, and overthrew books and inkstands in spatters of writing fluid. One after one the senators in his path were swept from their chairs and crawled underneath the tables to escape the torrent that swept after him. Over the Speaker's rail, across the rostrum on the platform, dashing down gas lamps and leaving fragments of his costume here and there like the spoor of a hunted hyena, the Martian bounded and the mad-eyed throng pelted in pursuit.

Upstairs and along the upper halls the outrageous man-hunt raged. The Member from Kingston had thrown off coat and vest, and the St. Andrew's cross of his red suspenders against the milk-white field of his shirt led the way like a guidon to the charge. Behind him the Honorable Members from Hull and Northfield galloped and swore, and stringing down hall and stair, plunging through door and entry, scattered the handicapped



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slowpokes of the procession, still steaming after the refugee.

In the third story, at the end of a long narrow corridor, the half-crazed Martian came upon a small door. It was locked, but the key was twinkling in its hole. In an instant it was whipped out, the door was opened; the lithe form of the visitant slid through and snapped was the lock in the closed portal. It was just in time. The Member from Kingston laid hand on the knob just as the bolt clicked; at his terrific wrench the china handle came off, and the reaction landed him on his back on the floor, where he was nearly trampled to death by the surging chorus which followed him. The mob penned in this narrow space jammed the whole hall, and for five minutes no one could move an elbow. Their shrieks, however, in time warned the rearward strugglers to make way, and by degrees the crowd thinned and permitted the Sergeant-at-Arms to force his way to the door and open the lock. Now burst the charge anew up the winding stair, through the cavernous hollow of the dome, and up the spiral to the upper cupola.

When the Sergeant-at-Arms, the policeman, and the members from Hull and Kingston reached the cupola chamber, it was empty, save of a few rags, and a sponge stained a bloody red. A bucket of water was of the same suspicious hue, but of human occupants the room had none. The searchers opened the windows and gazed down upon the huge hemisphere of gilded dome. It was uninhabited, though upon the bulbs of the incandescent lights that punctuated the circle at its foot there fluttered a few fragments of red cloth. The pursuers were nonplussed. Finally the policeman, craning his neck out of the window, felt a spat-



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ter upon his neck. He wiped it with his hand and perceived a dash of white paint upon his fingers. Then, looking up, over the round roof of the cupola, he saw what the crowd below, gathered in Beacon Street opposite the Shaw Memorial, saw. They blocked the thoroughfare, and all eyes were aimed upward. The policeman gave a cry, and it was answered by a cheer from the street. The Sergeant-at-Arms and the Members from Hull and Kingston shot their heads, also, through the windows and gazed skyward.

There, at the very top of the flagpole, slung from the halliards sat a painter in jumper and overalls daubing the staff with white lead. Thirty feet above them, swinging in perilous mid-air, he looked down at the passion-branded visages below, and gayly flicked his brush. Like white rain the drops fell into the eyes and ears of the Committee. "Come down out of that!" they yelled; and the policeman brandished his club with authority.

Now slowly, deliberately, descended Bounder, lowering himself with caution down the halliards. He crawled over the curve of the roof, guiding his feet one after the other with precision to the steps nailed to the copper sheathing. He navigated the ledge and handed his paint pot and brush to the waiting delegation. Then he stepped through the window and hopped with a snicker to the floor.

The battery of inquisitors opened a fire of questions. The interrogations went off like the corns in a popper. But Bounder took his time. He wiped a smooch of white from his brow with the back of his wrist, and he wiped the back of his wrist on the seat of his overalls. Then he opened his mouth to speak.

"Yep," he said, "I seen him. He came to this here



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window and he yelled like a mad dog. He cowered onto the sill and I seen he had three laigs like a bloomin' giraffe, and then, whoop! jumped outer winder and flew up inter the sky like a bird! And that's all I know about it!"

Chapter Ten

THE TEMPLE OF MARS

She . . . lives in mists and smokes where none can find her.
(Rule a Wife and Have a Wife.)



THE miraculous disappearance of the Martian made an enormous sensation. Bounder's cool-headed ruse in donning the uniform of a house-painter and hoisting himself to the top of the flagpole with pot and brush had saved the day against huge odds. If Martian Science were at its darkest just before that spectacular dawn, its day now burst into legislative effulgence unlooked for even by the inner council of the cult. Miss Mischief's rhetoric had driven the nail of logic into the thick skulls of the committeemen, and Bounder's *coup d'état* had clinched the argument in their pates. They had been proven materialists by the evidence of Miss Mischief's blue gown. Well, as materialists they had been given confirmation by their senses in the disappearance of the Martian envoy, who had, according to definite testimony, plunged into space and had regained his planetary home from the cupola of the State House. The cupola was still there to witness the translation of this new Elijah!

The Martian Bill, therefore, backed by these five proselytes, was rushed through a first and second reading; the debate was made upon the question of public policy, and patriotism prevailed. It was well proven that, if Massachu-



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setts did not avail herself of the divine possibilities of Martian aid, some other state would reap the benefit. Delegates from Kansas and South Dakota had appeared to lobby against the bill and secure for the Far West the prestige of initiating the New Era of Thought. It needed but this rivalry to carry the act. The era of psychic science was dawning, and the Bay State stood boldly, at last, by an overwhelming majority for the new epoch of transplanetary Truth. Licence was given the Martian College of Psychic Science to confer degrees, the Temple was subsidized and exempted from taxes, and a generous appropriation was granted for the development of systematic research in the psychic laboratory of the High Priestess.

As Miss Mischief had predicted, the Cult of Mars now became a rage, an epidemic, a crusade. The Temple boiled with ardent believers lashed into an almost Mahometan bigotry with the scourging texts of the Book of Bosh. The movement stood, not only for a religion, but for a definite reform. It was consecrated, not to the good of the individual, but to the development of the race. It was no mere system of medicine, though that too was included in its work, but it stood for pure Science — a new Philosophy, Mathematics, Physics, everything. Its claims were as huge as the Cosmos itself. The Gospel of the Flame was in its first effect intoxicating — it needed the digestion of analytic feeling rather than any process of coarse reason.

Temples were instituted in outlying suburbs to accommodate the increasing demands put upon the official headquarters of the High Priestess, and over these members of the higher Orders were placed in charge. The Spiral Arched Whorl constituted the caste mark of this hierarchy of the Minor Priestcraft, and these ministered through the



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direct inspiration of the Book of Bosh. In that volume everything essential to terrestrial progress had been laid down. Extemporaneous speaking was prohibited. The authority of the High Priestess was sacred and absolute. When she entered a Temple, the whole audience arose and stood with eyes cast down until she had taken her place. Her effigy was portrayed in stained glass and marble bust, and texts from the Book of Bosh appeared streaming from her mouth in the symbolistic engravings of the "Martian Monthly."

But, as the weeks went on, she was seen less and less frequently. The revenues from the sale of the Book, at five dollars per copy, printed on India paper, had swollen her treasury. Times were prosperous with Madelaine Mischief. She lived, now, in a villa at Manchester-by-the-Sea, and she went and came in special trains, appearing and disappearing in Boston, with the exclusive mystery of a reigning monarch. Roulhac's protestations were of no avail, and she kept him to his post at the First Temple of Mars with the implacability of a slave-driver. At each revolt she soothed him with glitteringly slippery promises and riveted his chains anew. The wedding should come off, she promised him, when she was ready, and not before.

He assuaged his impatience with cordial doses of Hetty Hattitude. She, at least, was willing to prescribe, and her companionship was tonic. Did he know what he did want? Perhaps not. He was so used to driving four-in-hand that sometimes he trembled to think of traveling with a single companion, and especially at the break-neck pace Miss Mischief would be likely to set for him. Miss Hattitude, now, gave him her whole worship. She did not blow hot and blow cold, she did not put him off and take him



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on, when the mood pleased her. And so he floated in an eddy of doubt.

Meanwhile Bounder, despite his desperate victory in the State House, seemed tormented with a secret fear. "Who is this Barowich?" he asked Roulhac one day.

"Oh, he's a San Francisco Nemesis," was the reply. "We rather had it in for him there, and he seems anxious to get even with us."

The answer affected Bounder uncomfortably, and he withdrew to his own office. But the sudden and nearly disastrous apparition of the ex-waiter of Campi's had more meaning to him than the rest of the cabal were aware. As yet nothing concerning the Licences or Indulgences uttered by Bounder had transpired. He still plied the traffic in secret, hoarding his winnings till the time should come when he could break away from this rigamarole and decamp with his profits. But he had recognized in the Slav a hideous menace to his plans. He searched his memory for evidence, and he went over his personal accounts with his victims. At last, after much introspection, he was able to put his memory and his notes together and add up the threatening amount. It was a curse; to Barowich he had, some weeks previous, sold a permit to steal to the enormous amount of a million of dollars. Such a grand larceny as this would undoubtedly make a stir. The theft would be traced, and Bounder himself might be implicated. He must escape before the crime was perpetrated. Perhaps it was even now too late, and detectives were on his trail.

He went to the safe where the community assets were kept, and where also, in a separate compartment, he hoarded his own resources. The annual appropriation



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from the legislature had been paid by the State Treasurer, and had been converted into specie for distribution to the different sub-temples. This, with contributions, donations, and subscriptions, the takings from the sales of the Book of Bosh and other sources, added up to something like \$789,040 in safe and easily negotiable securities. His own fortune ran up to some \$210,960. It was almost a competence. As soon as he had secured for himself a full quarter of a million he would disappear, quit the conspiracy, and fly high on Piccadilly again. He locked the combination, with this comforting assurance, and quieted his fears.

Mortimer Stencill alone seemed to take the swelling bubble of the Martian cult calmly. Mortimer was a philosopher of sorts. His dreams were all subjective. Active, whenever that pose seemed to be on the whole worth while, he was at his best in a passive state in his slippers before the fire, or gazing upon the easily found spectacle of the Fool at Large. He was not averse to lending a quiet hand at any game that promised diversion, but his work was preferably behind the scenes. He was fond of humming the refrain of a Rochester poet and dreamer :

“ I love to watch the pictures of the things inside of me ! ”

His wife afforded him perpetual amusement. She was curiously anxious for his pleasure and incited him repeatedly to endeavor, but with little result. He was for a game of solitaire, and there his queens were all alike ; there are no trumps in “ Patience.” Roberta he watched with a mild scrutiny, but held his hand. He did not warn the young Braghampton that peril was in store for him, though



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he knew well enough that his wife was not in secret council with the High Priestess for nothing. He did not mention to the San Francisco youth that Mrs. Stencil had made several hasty trips to Manchester-by-the-Sea, nor that a match-maker cares not whom she entangles in the toils of matrimony so long as she can make a victim of somebody.

A manifesto finally came from the retreat of the High Priestess in the form of a specific interpretation to a much discussed chapter of the Book of Bosh. It was given, without comment, to Roulhac Braghampton for publication and, as he read it, his eyes watered.

“It is written,” it went, “in the Seventy-seventh Chapter of the Book of Bosh that ‘the Gospel of the Fire shall be revealed by a Woman and a Man from the Third Sphere, coming in Flame to arouse the Children of the Fire. By them shall the Word come and the Truth be made manifest. And they shall have dominion over the Fourth Sphere and pass on the Flame. And the Two Flames shall be One Flame and shall burn withal.’

“Now the time for this union, predicted of Phryko, has come, and the union of the High Priestess with the incarnate Flame shall come to pass upon the Third Day of July approaching. Wherefore shall all Believers in the Fire be summoned to witness the Ritual of the Union of the Flames that the one Flame which is Red shall burn upon the Fourth Sphere.”

Right gayly did the bridegroom set out to share his rapture with his promised bride, but Miss Mischief kept herself aloof by hook and crook with a teasing shrewdness. Not till the day before the ordeal did she appear at the Temple, but there Roulhac found her in the upper Mysterium, clos-



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eted with Roberta Stencill and Miss Hattitude. The three, surprised at his entrance, looked up guiltily enough, but Miss Mischief composed them, and entered into the discussion of the ceremony, without allowing herself to be catechized. The wedding was to be solemnized at noon, according to the great sidereal clock, before a gathering of the original members of the First Temple of Mars. The groom was to enter and await his bride before the red altar, where the flame burned day and night, and the High Priestess, robed and veiled in red, was to come separately from the conical tower above. Guy Bounder, licenced and duly ordained as a Minor Priest of the Order of the Seven-Headed Salamander, was to administer the ritual. Mrs. Burlap and Mrs. Essery, representing the laity, were to offer the allegiance of the cult to the United Priests of the Fire; and Mortimer Stencill, presiding at the keys of the color organ, was to provide the accessories.

After these details had been arranged and rehearsed, Roulhac found himself at last with Miss Mischief in the gloom of the immense audience room. They sat together in silence for a while, and she did not reprove him when he slipped his hand into hers.

"And do you really love me, foolish boy?" said Miss Mischief.

"Yes," said Roulhac, and without doubt he believed it. He gazed at her hungrily, at any rate.

"Yet you have loved many," said the slender girl at his side, turning away her eyes.

"Indeed I have," he replied. "I have loved Lady Méchante, I have loved Kitty Carmine, and the Countess Rouge, and Florizelle Gaillarde, and Cicely Fex, and Celestine Jewburg, and Madelaine Mischief!"



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“And Hetty Hattitude?” queried the lady with the many names.

“She is a Bostonian,” he answered, fingering a button. “She has impressed me, I admit, but I have given her only the fealty of my intellect. But why mention Hetty?”

“You must love her!” was the reply. “But you must love me better! Kiss me!”

“No, no!” cried Roulhac, wildly. “I have kissed you but once and in that kiss I lost you. Not till we are married and I am sure of you shall I dare try it again!”

Miss Mischief arose, and with a sign to Roulhac not to follow her, left the hall. There was a look upon her face as if she had discovered a fly in the cream.

The third of July was hot and still. The thermometer climbed up and up, as if the weather were to testify to the coming of the universal gospel of Fire. Across Copley Square delegation after delegation marched towards the red brick cone of the First Temple of Mars. The audience chamber filled, and still the members from the country arrived, till the steps, sidewalks, and courtyard were packed with Martian Scientists.

In the hall the vast throng, hushed into silence by the solemnity of the coming service, sat and in the twilight of the shaded windows watched the shifting harmonies of color that came and went upon the black screen. As the sidereal clock pealed forth the meridian, the tones grew more and more vivid, till, at last, bathed in a fierce red light, Roulhac Braghampton, clad in the velvet robes of the Supreme Order of the Fire of Mars, stepped forth upon the platform in the center of the hall and took his place beside the flaming altar. Guy Bounder, crowned with the abacot of the seven-



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headed salamander, drew to his side and mustered what dignity he could in the thousand eyes of the congregation. They were not, however, for long pointed in his direction.

The secret door leading to the stairway opened, and the High Priestess, garbed in flowing red, appeared in the arch, stood for a moment against the shadow, and then came up the aisle, followed by Mrs. Burlap and Mrs. Essery in black bonnets. It was not imperative, in the ritual of Mars, that bridesmaids should be virgins.

The ceremony proceeded. Bounder outdid himself. The audience was impressed, and many wept. In the silence following the first responses was heard the trotting of a horse's hoofs, two horses in fact. There was also the scrape of a wheel skiving a curbstone. Then all was still again, and the service went on.

The bride, still veiled, spoke her answers in a low, maidenly voice, unlike the ordinary assertiveness of Miss Mischief. Roulhac was supremely himself, a hero in his own eyes, and seemed worthy the dignity of alliance with this red-robed Daughter of the Fire. The time at last came for the wife to throw off her veil and salute the throng. This she did with an august fling of her arm, and stood revealed as she who, but a half minute ago, had been Miss Hetetia Hattitude, now the plighted spouse of Roulhac Braghampton.

Upon Roulhac the revelation fell with an almost stunning force. Bounder could not believe his eyes. Mrs. Burlap stared and Mrs. Essery tottered in a fainting spell. But the High Priestess gave the spectators no time to express their astonishment. With a wave of her hand she compelled silence, and drawing from a fold of her gown a scroll, she read the following words:

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“Know ye, Children of the Fire, and members of the Temples of Mars by me instituted and all others of the Cult, that this day I, Madelaine Mischief, resign the office of High Priest and hereby confer it upon her who shall proclaim these presents. The time is at hand when my work shall be accomplished. The Science, fully and well ordained, has made its way despite threat and persecution, and, wearied with the labor of directing its energies, I have renounced my office, never to return. Labor ye in the vineyard that I have planted, that the whole Truth be made known and the Fourth Sphere attain the full Flame of the Fire. When at last the time shall come for the flame to be passed on to the Fifth Sphere which men call Saturn, then shall I be reëmbodied and direct the communication. Peace, and Desire forever !”


Threading the wondering worshipers who murmured together at the news, the dazed Braghampton and his bride passed up the aisle, through the arch, and climbed the stairway to the Mysterium.

Chapter Eleven

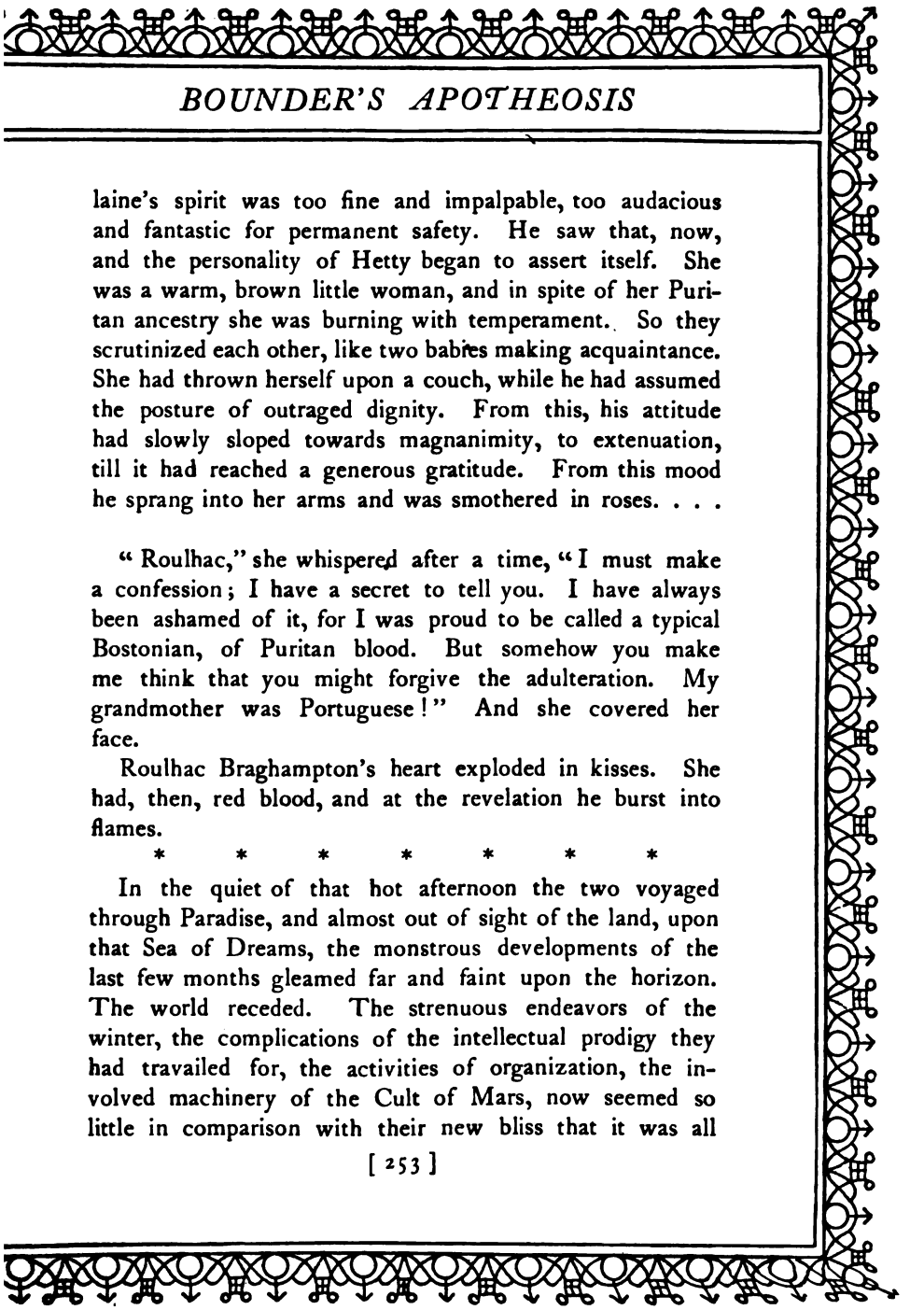
BOUNDER'S APOTHEOSIS

Did your eyes ever taste like clown of him ?

(Every Man in his Humour.)

HE pair were at last alone in the conical apartment of the High Priestess. Roulhac, who from the moment of the metamorphosis in his bride had said no word, and had well hidden his surprise from the congregation, turned to the slight airy witch at his side. She had indeed done quaintly so to outwit him and to marry him despite himself. He could not but smile at her knavery, though the memory of the prettier wretch, her accomplice, pricked him where his heart had been.

But Hetty's bravado had now broken. The achievement of the end she had for so long worked left her hysterical, and she was no sooner in the room than she fell to crying. To her young husband she wept poniards. He was not one to resist such feminine entreaty. After all, it was Fate. The marriage had been decided for him. The weather-vane of his heart would now no longer shuffle him this way and that; the wind had set forever in Hetty's favor. Miss Mischief had disappeared, and Roulhac knew with what energy she augmented her decisions. She was not for him, nor ever could be. Something new was born in his soul; he was steadied as if, after much zig-zag drifting and circumlocution, he had dropped anchor. Made-



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laine's spirit was too fine and impalpable, too audacious and fantastic for permanent safety. He saw that, now, and the personality of Hetty began to assert itself. She was a warm, brown little woman, and in spite of her Puritan ancestry she was burning with temperament. So they scrutinized each other, like two babes making acquaintance. She had thrown herself upon a couch, while he had assumed the posture of outraged dignity. From this, his attitude had slowly sloped towards magnanimity, to extenuation, till it had reached a generous gratitude. From this mood he sprang into her arms and was smothered in roses. . . .

"Roulhac," she whispered after a time, "I must make a confession; I have a secret to tell you. I have always been ashamed of it, for I was proud to be called a typical Bostonian, of Puritan blood. But somehow you make me think that you might forgive the adulteration. My grandmother was Portuguese!" And she covered her face.

Roulhac Braghampton's heart exploded in kisses. She had, then, red blood, and at the revelation he burst into flames.

* * * * *

In the quiet of that hot afternoon the two voyaged through Paradise, and almost out of sight of the land, upon that Sea of Dreams, the monstrous developments of the last few months gleamed far and faint upon the horizon. The world receded. The strenuous endeavors of the winter, the complications of the intellectual prodigy they had travailed for, the activities of organization, the involved machinery of the Cult of Mars, now seemed so little in comparison with their new bliss that it was all



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drowned in a corner of Hetty's first small tear. The High Priestess herself had abandoned the movement. It had reached its climax ; it had gone up like a huge hot-air balloon, flaming resplendent through the night of Boston's sober reason. Should they wait alone till the fire burned out, and the charred airship ceased its ascent, wavered, and began to drop ?

A thousand times, No ! They resolved to leave the bark with all sails set, climb over the side, and let the Cult of Mars plunge forward to ruin alone, wrecking with a magnificent disaster.

"Hetty," said Roulhac, "we 'll off to the Southern Seas ! There, in the land of the raw-boned pineapple, where the uncombed cocoanut defies the digestion, where bananas grow upon every tree like bunches of red and yellow fire-crackers, and the simpering natives go clad in a subcutaneous garment of blue ink, there shall we make our home ! There on some coral islet, where the booming billows of the reef peal forth the *table d'hôte* hour for sharks, where the loveliest ladies have faces like patterns for rag-carpets, and brave warriors dye their hair in vegetable soup, where the missionary on his prayer-bones beseeches the Grand Panjandrum to accept the honor of a bicep of mansteak *à la Corbett*, where the black-and-tan warriors go forth to the fray with pea-shooters, there we shall build up our Renaissance, and do our wedding-cake-walk upon the beach. We have exhausted Civilization. Let us begin again at the beginning !"

They crept out of the Mysterium as the dusk fell, locked the door quietly, and stole out by way of a secret door. There was a light burning in the Treasurer's Office, and they avoided that exit elaborately.

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After the excitement of the day, Guy Bounder had felt privileged to go off on a prolonged tear. His old instincts reverted under the effects of the stimulation, and for the whole afternoon he forgot that he had ever been a Minor Priest of the Martian Order of the Seven Headed Salamander. Not for him, now, the Martian cocktail, with its insidious combination of egg and cochineal; his thirst was only to be assuaged by bitter beer and 'arf-and-'arf's, and still more congenial gin. His progress from bar to bar became unsteady; had he practiced ten years on the Mazurka he could not have mapped out his travels with more eccentric divagation. He could well afford the expense of inviting his familiar spirits to share the celebration, for that day he had received the fee for his offices at the Temple, and the quarter of a million dollars was nearly attained. The tide was rising; he saw no reason why, in the course of a month at least, he might not prepare his escape.

The plaid waistcoat and all contained therein was, at last, under the patronage of a friendly policeman, loaded aboard a herdic, and Bounder, in a husky but cordial voice, directed it towards Copley Square and the quiet refuge of the Temple. With his bowler hat over one eye, his feet bedaubing the front seat-cushion, the Grand Treasurer rolled down Boylston Street, singing, with a bubbling barytone accented by many original semi-quavers:

*"Jawn was a narce good 'us-band, 'E never cared to roam,
'E only wanted a quiet life; 'E only wanted a quiet wife;
There 'e would sit by the fireside, such a chilly man was
Jawn —*

*Oh, I 'ope and trust there's a narce 'ot fire,
W'ere my old man's gone!"*

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The Temple of Mars was at last reached, and Guy tumbled out upon the sidewalk. The driver fished in the Treasurer's pocket, found a five-dollar gold piece, bit it, mounted, and drove off. Bounder staggered to his feet. There was an express wagon at the corner, and a man appeared from a back alley with a large sack, which he deposited upon the cart. Guy stared, with half a wonder at the phenomenon, but then, striking gayly into the air again, he made his circuitous way to his private door and fell in slumber upon a chair in the office.

The slamming of a gate awakened him finally, and he rose, drank like a horse of the cold water standing in the basin, and wiped his face with a towel. Then he looked in the glass. "Won't do! Won't do, for Grand Treshrer!" he informed himself, and, to assure himself of his dignity, he stumbled to the safe to refresh himself with a sight of his money.

The safe door stood open. All the drawers were pulled out and lay bottom up upon the floor of the vault. He made a mad dash at his own particular compartment, and found it as empty as the rest. In an instant he was sobered, as sane as if he had been held under a pump. With a raucous guttural howl, an oath ripped out of his throat, and he sprang up with the fury of a million demons.

The Cockney, reduced to poverty at this dire snatch, relapsed, with a mouthful of horrid oaths, into his normal condition. It was atavism. The varnish, so long and so carefully smeared over his brutality by the brush of Lady Méchante, peeled off at the shock of ire. He was once more the professional criminal, the pot-house brawler, the sneak-thief Hooligan of the Newington Causeway. He spoke once again in the bitter biting tropes of London's



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submerged tenth. He became a "Lag," and he gave voice to the jargon of the Penitentiary.

"Bilked!" he shrieked. "Bilked, by the Lord George Hell! Holy Harry! They've done a bust here to beat the bloodiest Brum in the New Cut! They ain't enough splosh left to pay for a 'arf a pint pot o' bitter, s'welp me! Strike me pink if the blitherin' swine ain't gort the hull swag, dam their bleedin' fyces for 'em! Narce little red lot they gort too, *my* word! They might jolly well have tyken the bloody syfe and bean done with it! Hell's teeth! but they pinched a good haul, the rotten beggars, *my* word they know *their* way abart, damn 'em! They've bleedin' well nipped the rolls o' thick-uns, and the long greens and the sparklers and every last tiddlin' bally bit o' loot an' I ain't gort a tuppenny left to bless myself with. S' help me Gawd, I'm back on me knuckle again as bad as Lambeth. Damn their bleedin' eyelids, but it mykes me sick! An' me payin' the pots for a lot o' bleedin' bums in ther kip-house darn town like a bleedin' toff on a furlough! Holy Mike! wot a charnst they 'ad, blimy, with the bloke on the cart doggin' 'em off and watchin' for slops while they done the job with gloves on! An' I carn't snap 'em nor put a Teck onto 'em fer fear o' bein' nabbed fer a little trick o' me own! They can grease off an' bally well do in the whole swag while I whistle for a tuck-in! Strike me blind if I ain't a bleedin' ass an' I carn't squeal! I gort to stand pals with ther blitherin' swine an' hold me jaw. Gawd, but I'd like to bloomin' well bryke their narsty fyces!"

The rest was too awful.

Then his eye caught sight of a note that was conspicuously pinned to a jamb of the door. He rubbed his watery eyes and pulled it off with a jerk. It was one of his

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own indulgences,—a licence to steal to the amount of \$1,000,000, and dated three months previously. And so was the biter bit. He did not need to inquire of his books who had victimized him. A great wave of fury told him that it was Barowich the Slav.

“I dreamed o’ that ’airy w’elp,” he said to himself. “I knew he’d bilk me, after he gort that mad-on at the State House. Curse his dirty fyce, if I only could get at him once, I’d stand him on ’is ugly ’ed an’ show him ’ow! I expect the swine calls this ’ere thing a joke on me. Gawd, I’ll land ’im in the Pen. for this, blimy if I don’t. I’ll jolly well set the bleedin’ house afire an’ have ’im snapped for arson, swelp me if I don’t! I’ll pull the bloomin’ plyce down an’ swear to his doin’ it, curse ’im!”

With this desperate resolve, Bounder arose, and, descending to the cellar, filled a large watering-pot with kerosene oil. With this he proceeded up and down the main aisles of the Temple, sprinkling the carpet generously with the fluid in every direction from the central altar. It was hard work, and his repeated trips to the lower regions inspired him with a gorgeous thirst. He had in his office the wherewithal to alleviate such an emergency, and he partook freely of a demijohn after each trip. His previous excitement, lulled by the shock of the burglary, arose fiercely again under the encouragement, and Bounder’s present condition was now, as compared with his former lapse of sobriety, as Hell to rose-water. It came then to his reeling mind that an appropriate costume for the deed would be the robes and abacot of a Minor Priest. The picture he drew of himself in this garb, signaling the Fire Brigade from an upper window, and subsequently accusing Barowich of the crime at the Police Headquarters, appealed



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to his exotic fancy as dramatic and sensational. With what wit he had left, therefore, he fastened on the red robe, and balanced the copper crown with its seven-headed salamander unsteadily upon his pate.

In Bounder's brain a billion devils now raged. For a while he fought them single-handed, and with mighty resolve. But the combination of liquors was too fierce for even the well-seasoned body of the Cockney. He reeled up the aisle and, with a gesture worthy of a larger audience, swept the fire from the altar to the floor. The flames sped north, south, east, and west like the blazing rays of a star. With a shriek of frenzy the Minor Priest ran from bench to bench in the direction of the door to the upper stairway. The feat could hardly have been achieved by a man in his sober senses, but Bounder was above all ordinary laws of equilibrium. He fumbled his way up the stairway, and, half-way up to the *Mysterium*, came upon a door. This led to a balcony some fifty feet from the ground, encircling the cone at the carved torus.

Midnight had but just been greeted by a cannonade of crackers and bombs, and the Fourth of July was beginning with fury. To Bounder's mind, unaware of the public celebration of Independence Day, these fireworks seemed but a part of his own magnificent plan, and he congratulated himself upon his success. Rockets and Roman candles ascended from all parts of the city, and the Minor Priest hailed them with lusty cheers.

His exuberance at last attracted the attention of the few pedestrians afloat at that hour, and soon a little flock of spectators gathered in the square watching the inebriated enthusiast who had found it desirable to herald the Fourth in such splendor. Stranger things than that had been wit-

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nessed at the Temple of Mars, and there was no suspicion that the exhibition was not held by authority. It was not long, however, before the Treasurer's consummate work in the hall below made itself evident. The lower windows were gradually lighted with a dull glow, which turned rapidly to a more brilliant red. Smoke curled from many orifices. The Temple was indubitably afire.

A policeman hurriedly rang an alarm, and all interest centered upon the figure upon the balcony. Bounder, not a little touched by the consideration he received, ran round the circle and stopped above the great door to address the congregation. The speech, had it been intelligible, would have proved infinitely diverting, but Bounder's tongue had now swollen beyond the possibilities of articulation.

With a clang and a roar three fire-engines swung into Copley Square, anchored, and affixed their great tubes to three several hydrants. The police roped off the enclosure to hold back the ever-increasing multitude, and a ladder-wagon, loaded with its long, swaying paraphernalia, galloped to the scene. Bounder's position had now become critical. With yells the crowd, seething below, sought to warn him of his danger, but it was not till he looked behind him that he realized that the spectacle had a nearer interest for him. Flames, sparks, and cinders were now darting in every direction about him, and his perch was hardly tenable. A wave of heat smothered him, but he stood in all the ridiculous pomp of his Martian character.

Fiercer grew the fire, and now Guy Bounder danced upon the heated iron balcony like a Hamburg goose upon a hot shovel. He climbed over the rail and held himself off the fury of the conflagration, howling obscene appeals and imprecations to the firemen below. It seemed impossible





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for him to exist there a minute longer, and as yet the ladders were not ready. Almost naked, clinging like a fly to the wall, his round head dripping with sweat, he was all but singed alive when the Chief ordered the hose turned upon him. Then began a drenching that brought him reason, deep dyed with horror. He shrunk alike from the flames and from the stream of water, but the fireman mercilessly held the nozzle of his hose in the direction of the now half-boiled wretch.

At last a ladder was raised and a fireman ran up to the rescue. Down they came, he and what was left of Bounder. A place was made for him, and the crowd closed in about him. Shivering, soggy, nude, Guy Bounder, Minor Priest of the Order of the Seven Headed Salamander, Grand Treasurer of the Temple and Cult of Mars, the last survivor of the Transplanetary Movement, lay in a tinted puddle of slush, a thing unspeakable.

A patrol wagon hurried up, the crowd parted, and the incendiary was loaded in. Then, held by four giggling policemen, he was galloped towards the police station. It was finished.

A week after, Mortimer Stencill, having finished his turn at Keith's, joined his wife, who was waiting for him in the foyer, and the two proceeded leisurely up the Tremont Street Mall. The day was warm, but the air was sweet. Boston is very good to those of her residents who honor her with their presence in the summer. The two were as happy as children. Theirs was a perpetual honeymoon.

At an exit of the Subway on the Common they came suddenly upon two ladies toiling up the subterraneous marble steps. One wore the unmistakable garment of authority.



BOUNDER'S APOTHEOSIS

The other was enveloped, as ever, in black silk, shiny and hard, over her thorax. It might have been suspected by their attitude that these companions would have preferred to pass unnoticed, but the collision was unavoidable.

"How de do!" chirped Mrs. Stencill, with the greatest amiability in the world, and she shook hands effusively.

"How de do!" said Mortimer, and the two ladies murmured the same appropriate greeting.

Mr. Stencill eyed them, with mild amusement at their embarrassment, but Roberta forced home her barb.

"And how is the Cult of Mars now, Mrs. Burlap? I hear little of it nowadays. Are you become High Priestess? Or perhaps it is Mrs. Essery!"

"Oh no!" Mrs. Braxton-Burlap said, in visible confusion. "I'm really afraid that movement is quite at an end. We were hardly ready for it even in Boston, you know! Sometime, perhaps, when we are developed further, we may take up the work again. But I have just been to hear a lecture upon the Use of the Toes. Do you know, our evolution has so neglected those members that they are now lapsed into mere extremities. They have great possibilities, however, I assure you, and it seems quite possible to educate their function so as to make them valuable aids in manipulation. Perhaps I should say pedipulation. It is really most extraordinary, and Mrs. Essery and I are thinking of starting classes in toe-culture this fall. Really, you know, it's wonderful! But there's our car now! We really must be off. *Do* come and see us sometime, Mrs. Stencill. Good bye! Good bye, Mr. Stencill, how well you're looking! Good bye, then."

And Mrs. Essery echoed, "*Good* bye!"

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Book Four

THE CAVE MAN

I have a new soul in me, made of a north-wind.

(The Woman's Prize.)

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Chapter One

THE FAIRY OF THE FLATIRON

How now, lime-twig, hast thou touched?

(Bartholomew Fair.)



IT is the French who have, to perfection, the art of making whatever is naughty nice, and what is nice naughty. Wherefore let us not call the lady's beauty devilish, but nominate its fascinating quality that of *diablerie*. *Beauté de diable* she had as well — though that is quite another thing — for she was but twenty-five. She had, in short, that sort of beauty which is called “troublesome,” and few men will need further commentary upon her looks.

By what was written in the delicious curve of her lips, in the evanescent, shadowy, waxing-waning dimple in her cheek, in the very crinkles of her eyelids, women might have said that she was probably more fond of men than of women. They might have said with perhaps more truth that women were less fond of her than were men. But whether one be the cause or the effect of the other, who can say? Ask Demiourgos, maker of men.

Women, also, might say that she had no soul. A man's answer would come as plainly; she did not need one. She did very well without, thank you; for there she was, most intensely and distractingly her own whimsical self,



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gifted with an original and provocative originality. She had more cinnamon and clove than sugar in her nature, though she was sweet enough too. But her charm was unanalyzable. Let us finish an impossible description, and call her "rare."

Rare she was, and fair she was, and she was twenty-five, this precious, ruddy-haired bonnibel who, in the seventeenth story of the Flatiron Building, gazed jauntily from the window down upon the traffic of New York. Gazed, and wondered; wondered, and let loose an exquisite smile, more dangerous than dynamite, more searching than radium, more swift and potent than electricity. One seeing her might have said of her, as the old slab in the Plymouth graveyard says of Fanney Crombie at the age of eight:

"As young as beautiful! as soft as young!
As gay as soft! as innocent as gay!"

and would have missed her description by but one adjective. She was not, perhaps, so innocent as she looked, though her peccadillos were venial.

The room, in the acute angle of the building, was triangular, and the window in its point looked up both Broadway and Fifth Avenue. It commanded Madison Square with its greenery as well. It gave upon the heart of the metropolis, at the lower end of the Great White Way. The apartment, intended for some sober, unimaginative insurance office, contained an exotic collection of furnishings. It was, in point of fact, a lady's drawing-room, conceived in European style, a finished perfect whole in schema and detail. Yet it was as original as the taste of so rare a lady should be, and showed the same personality, the same spicy



THE FAIRY OF THE FLATIRON

taste. Commodious, comfortable even to restfulness, it dared risk high lights, admirably disposed, and showed a virile note of composition, a tendency that ran rather to contrasts than to harmonies, showing the mark of her mind throughout, and fitting her as a frame its portrait. No man would have feared to trust her chairs; no woman could criticize her hangings, but neither would have noticed aught else when their hostess was in evidence. No need, then, to catalogue the room's items, except, perhaps, to remark a portrait of the lady herself by Boldini, which set the appropriate keynote of the whole. In that presentment she sat upon a golden chair, a little more feline, a little more fluently composed, a little more pointed as to mouth and eyes, a little more eighteenth century, than was due her charm, but the lady herself indubitably, apparently about to smile and toss a jest across the Bokhara rug. During her rare moments of sober introspection it even rivaled her in liveliness and persuasive force; but when the real smile came, the picture receded into its frame, sighed, and fell asleep.

And, to finish, there was no silver in the place, no whitish sheen such as ladies commonly affect; what was not gold was copper, burnished to a glowing red.

But she has rested there at the window, ambient-eyed, too long. Let's move her, like a puppet, and permit New York to thrill at the touch of her pink finger.

Did your pulse quicken that day, as you passed the windy angle of the great building? Did no titillation X-ray you as you maneuvered along the blown thoroughfare of Twenty-third Street? Perhaps not, for you were not her mark. Yet that smile of hers found its bullseye, though



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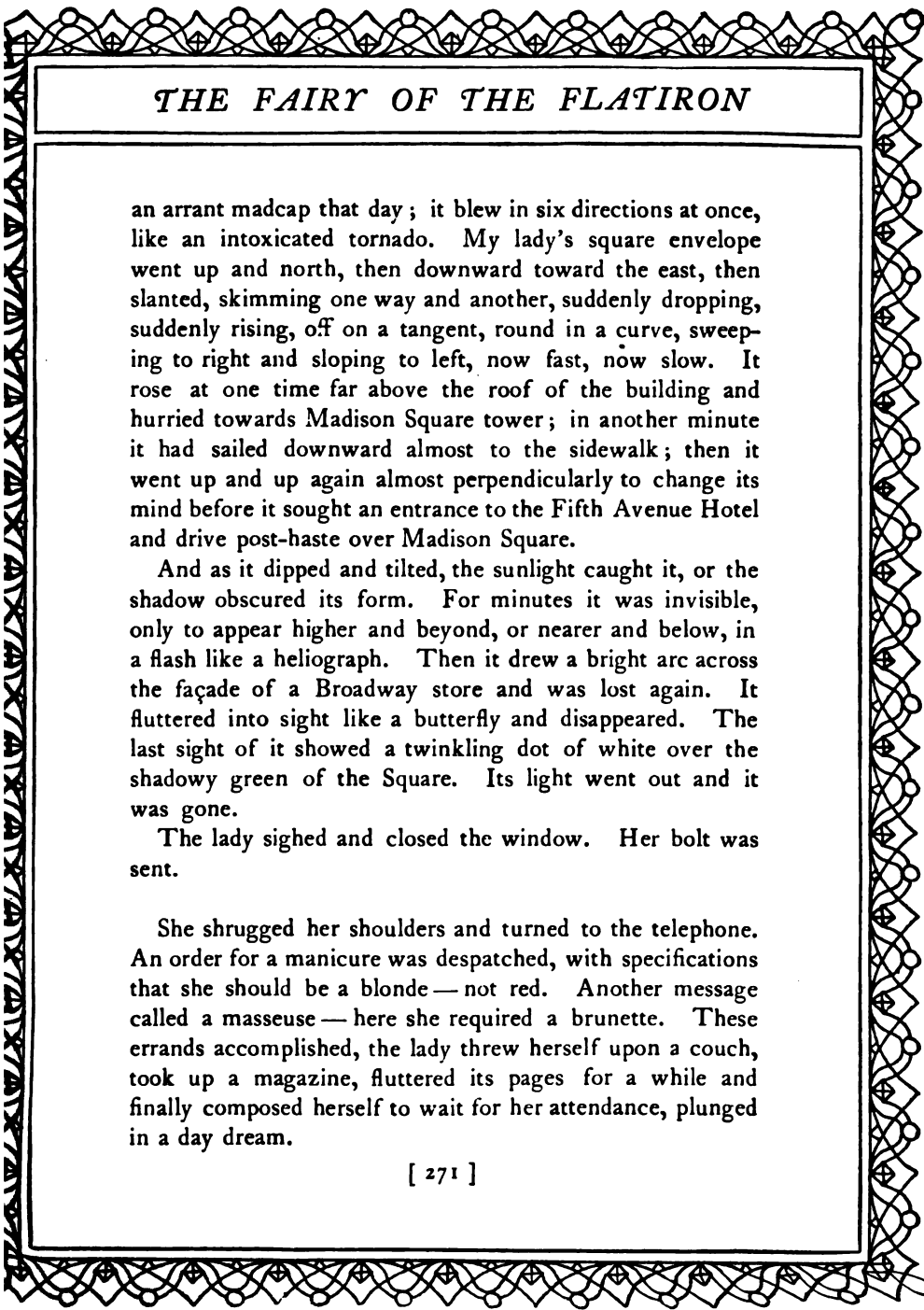
she shot with one eye shut. Destiny aimed her arrow ;
this lovely lady did but pull the cord.

That ingenious smile had been fathered by a deft resolve, and mothered by the lady's love of mystery. Her mind made up, she returned to her escritoire and drew from a pigeonhole a yellow hundred-dollar bill. This, with a quick motion of her gracile fingers, she tore in halves. One went back to the pigeonhole, the other into a square envelope. Next, she sat down to write. There was some small nibbling of her gold penholder, some scowling of her arched brows, before ink touched paper ; but, a few seconds after, there appeared, in a bold feminine hand and with but a single flourish at the end, the following wet words :

“ If the finder of this is a woman, give it to the nearest man. If a man, call at Room No. 1798, Flatiron Building, as soon as possible for the other half of the enclosed bill.”

This note she tucked into the envelope and sealed the flap. Lastly, she walked gayly to the window, looked out for a moment, and then flung her missive forth upon the breeze.

The wind, parted by the wedge-shaped bulk of the Flatiron Building, plays many capers in the vicinity. With wanton wiles it mischiefs with the skirts of pedestrians, it snatches hats from heads and sends them aeroplaning aloft, it scurries in eddies and whirlpools, it describes helter-skelter routes in curves and dizzying zigzags. The most sedate blast, in its progress across the island, here plays truant for a half-hour to torture and baffle passers-by. The air was



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an arrant madcap that day ; it blew in six directions at once, like an intoxicated tornado. My lady's square envelope went up and north, then downward toward the east, then slanted, skimming one way and another, suddenly dropping, suddenly rising, off on a tangent, round in a curve, sweeping to right and sloping to left, now fast, now slow. It rose at one time far above the roof of the building and hurried towards Madison Square tower ; in another minute it had sailed downward almost to the sidewalk ; then it went up and up again almost perpendicularly to change its mind before it sought an entrance to the Fifth Avenue Hotel and drive post-haste over Madison Square.

And as it dipped and tilted, the sunlight caught it, or the shadow obscured its form. For minutes it was invisible, only to appear higher and beyond, or nearer and below, in a flash like a heliograph. Then it drew a bright arc across the façade of a Broadway store and was lost again. It fluttered into sight like a butterfly and disappeared. The last sight of it showed a twinkling dot of white over the shadowy green of the Square. Its light went out and it was gone.

The lady sighed and closed the window. Her bolt was sent.

She shrugged her shoulders and turned to the telephone. An order for a manicure was despatched, with specifications that she should be a blonde — not red. Another message called a masseuse — here she required a brunette. These errands accomplished, the lady threw herself upon a couch, took up a magazine, fluttered its pages for a while and finally composed herself to wait for her attendance, plunged in a day dream.




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Haulick Smagg, his eyes fixed upon the ground, his coal shovel over his shoulder, heaved his six feet of bulk stolidly across Madison Square, walking as heavily as a dray horse. From his bony ovoid head his eyeballs looked out through a grime of coal dust, and beneath them a row of white teeth cut a horizontal line across his visage. The rest of his face was lost in the *mélange* of dirt, hair, and matted whiskers, all save two great ears, one on each side of his skull, poised wing-like, as if for flight. His carnivorous jaw worked ponderously upon a cud of tobacco; his left arm swung back and forth like a piece of crude machinery. His dress was nondescript, blackened to a homogeneous filthiness by the pasty soot. There was little charm about Haulick Smagg, small subtlety, and less poetry. He was a walking clod, a human animal, a Thing.

He had been discharged from the coal yard that noon, and no vernal joyance filled his heart. As he crossed the Square, his thoughts, if he thought at all, were fixed on dinner. The spasmodic rise and fall of the fountain in the pool sent him no message of hope or beauty; the leafage, so tenderly green about him, conjured no æsthetic thrill. Dinner obsessed him. He still had twenty-two cents left wherewith to eat and drink, and sulkily he planned his meal. The necessity, at this crisis, of getting drunk worried him, and he planned his campaign. To get dinner and get drunk on twenty-two cents was the greatest problem, so far, he had ever had to solve.

Haulick Smagg — but why Haulick? Ah! His mother had been a gipsy; she gave him a strain of something Oriental that wandered errant through his thick blood. Kidnapped on Hampstead Heath by a pious, erratic Non-conformist parson who had hoped to rescue a soul from



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vagrancy and perdition, the Romany waif had grown up in the scullery of the parson's home at Dorking. Her heredity, however, had proved stronger than environment. The call of the wind stirred her and she was off a-roving at fifteen. Her voyage, brief but lively, ended when she met Bill Smagg, and she came safely into the port of wifehood. With that she espoused respectability, her only infidelities being occasional dreams of romance consequent upon her habitual fondness for eel pie. It was in one of these pleasant visions that the name was revealed unto her. It was a dream of a gorgeous Italian with a green shirt and yellow, floating scarf, who swore heroically upon a Thames river barge. As he stood upon the stern of his craft, the name "Samuel J. Haulick" showed plainly beneath him. The dream, recounted to Mr. Smagg so soon after his ninth son was born, seemed portentous to both the parents. The neighbors thought so, too, and the greengrocer, as well as the keeper of the eel-pie house round the corner. The result was that the infant was named Haulick Smagg and thrived notwithstanding.

At the age of five, however, Haulick Smagg had succeeded in running away from home, made his way to Southampton, and, after a few years of vicissitude, stowed himself away upon the bark *Scarlatina* and was carried to New York. From this port he had never departed. Forgot was his gipsy mother, forgot his father, forgot the eel-pie house, and forgot his native idiom and dialect. Haulick was, for all he knew, an American; he knew, at least, that he was a coal-heaver who had lost his job and was now treading an unaccustomed part of the city.

(At last we have caught up with him. He has passed the nursemaids now, passed the policeman watching the

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nursemaids, passed the sleeping men with newspapers, passed the khaki-clad recruiting sergeant.)

Why he crossed the Square he did not know. But Destiny drew him. Destiny and dinner.

Of a sudden something drew his eyes from the flagged walk and raised them to a figure ahead. To him it was but a lady — a creature out of his world, out of his ken, an object as foreign as the angels, as inaccessible as champagne, as mysterious as money. What ladies were made of he neither knew nor desired to know; what they did he had never even wondered. He accepted them as parts of the city's fauna, a little less strange than pigeons, a little more difficult than dogs — bright-clad animals which, though seemingly harmless, he distrusted and avoided. That they were human, that they had anything physically or mentally in common with such women as he had known, had never entered his head.

With a thrill of annoyance, the fact broke through his torpor that this one, holding something white in her hand, smiling magically, was definitely, positively approaching him; she was intending to speak. To speak to *him*. The idea was madness; but he had scant time for wonder.

She was jauntily clad in the extreme of the jaunty fashion of that day, complete from hat to heels, as smart as he was squalid, as graceful as he was glum. Slim as a snake was Dolly Van Dream that April day, in a blue tailor-made suit that made every female passer-by suspect her figure. Her hat was black, her gloves milk-white, her shoes twinkled like mirrors on her high-arched little feet. The *modiste* who had turned her out, fresh and sharp from the stylish mold of the hour, may have turned out many like her, but none so spick, none so



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clean, none so silkily smooth and cleverly right and trig and taut and gladsome.

She stopped in front of him — actually stopped, did she — and held a white envelope out to him. He had never been so near to a lady's clean-cut head, white skin, and animated eyes. He gripped his shovel and stared wildly, his mouth ajar.

“Here,” she said, and to Haulick Smagg her voice was cadenced as if it came from miles away — from the moon or Sirius. “Here, my good man, take this. It may be worth your while.”

He was now stricken, and stood an insensate statue of surprise.

“Let me explain it for you,” she went on, and, drawing a sheet of paper from the envelope, she pointed to some writing. “It says here that if you take this to Room 1798 in the Flatiron Building” — she waved airily to the colossal wedge — “you will get a hundred dollars. See, here is one half of a hundred-dollar bill.” Her slim fingers plucked the torn yellow bill from its nest. “Would you like to try it?”

He had never seen a hundred-dollar bill before; no, never a fifty. To him money was green and dirty and wrinkled always, and always stained and torn. But her words — though with her accent they came as foreign as French — aroused an instinct, and he put forth his hand. If this thing were indeed money, he should lose no time. He grabbed it from her with a crafty plunge, and crumpled it in his fingers. But speech came not unto him.

“You see, it says that a woman may n't get it,” Miss Van Dream went sweetly on, “and I was requested to give it to the nearest man. It sounds interesting, and I'm sorry



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I'm not eligible. So you're to take this to the room and you'll be given the other half. A hundred dollars. Will you do it?" She looked at him with well-bred curiosity. Social emergencies had schooled her and she dared to smile.

Slowly he released his fingers and gazed at the crumpled half-bill as if it had been an imprisoned bird and might escape. He put it to his nose and smelled it. Yes, it smacked of money. Then the dream was true! Then he opened his lips. Perhaps a drop of gipsy blood grew potent in him; perhaps there is a very spirit in lucre that inspires and exalts, a power that informs ignorance and quickens apathy.

"Thanks!" His voice came raucous, but it came. "I'll do it!" It was his first moral victory. The spark had lighted up his soul. He had spoken to a lady. But, with a sudden reflex, his fingers tightened upon the treasure.

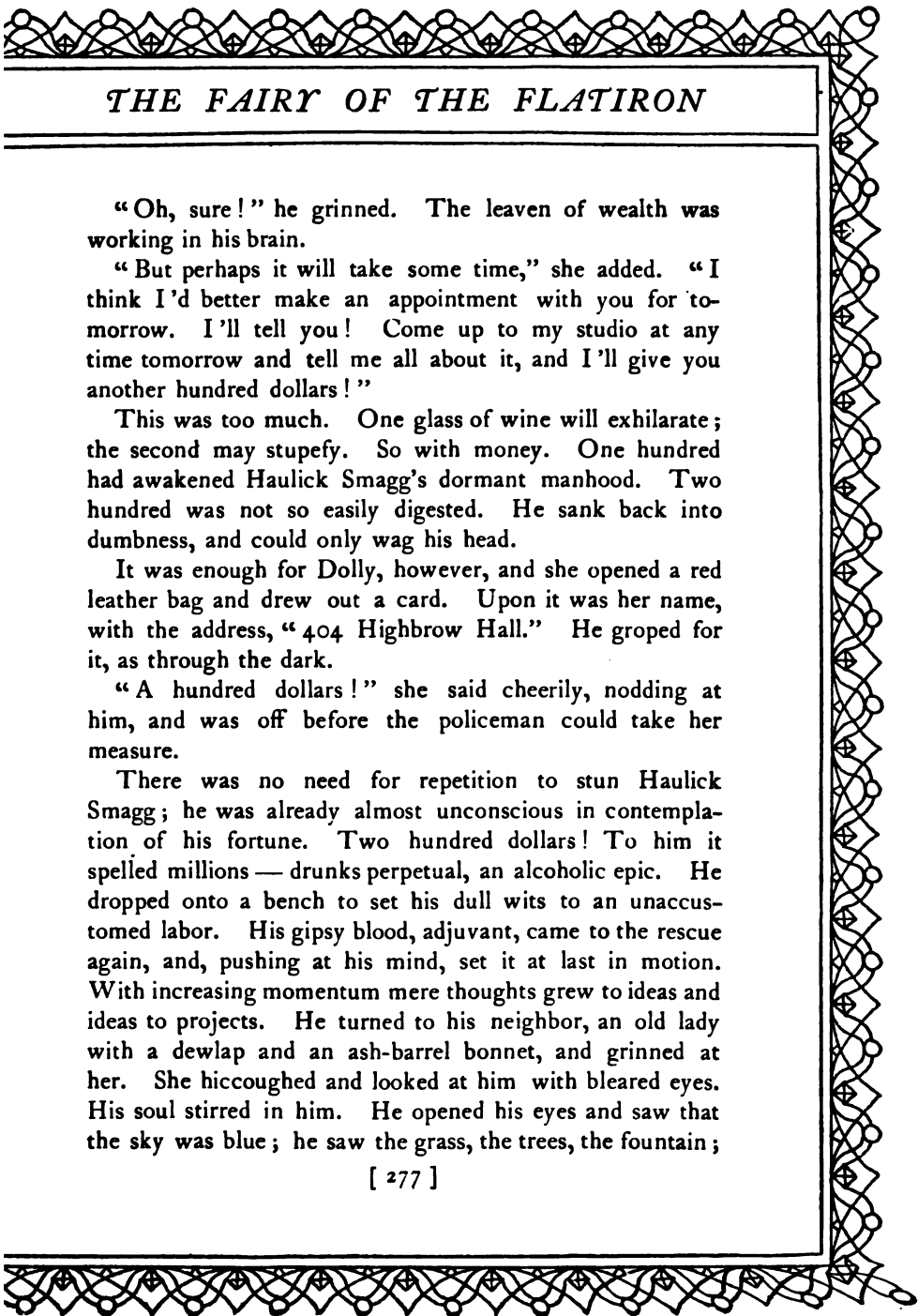
Then, "Gimme the paper!" he exclaimed.

He grabbed that, too, and read it painfully, the stumpy end of his black forefinger traveling slowly along the lines. Miss Van Dream gazed at him amused. A few passers-by stopped and stared. Her proud gaze swept them on like a chill breeze. As they stood there, a policeman caught sight of this Beauty and the Beast and started saunteringly their way. The movement aroused her to action.

"Listen, my good man," she said. "Now that I've done something for you, I'm going to ask you to do something for me. After you've got the hundred dollars up there, will you come and tell me all about it?"

"Huh?"

She repeated the question.



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"Oh, sure!" he grinned. The leaven of wealth was working in his brain.

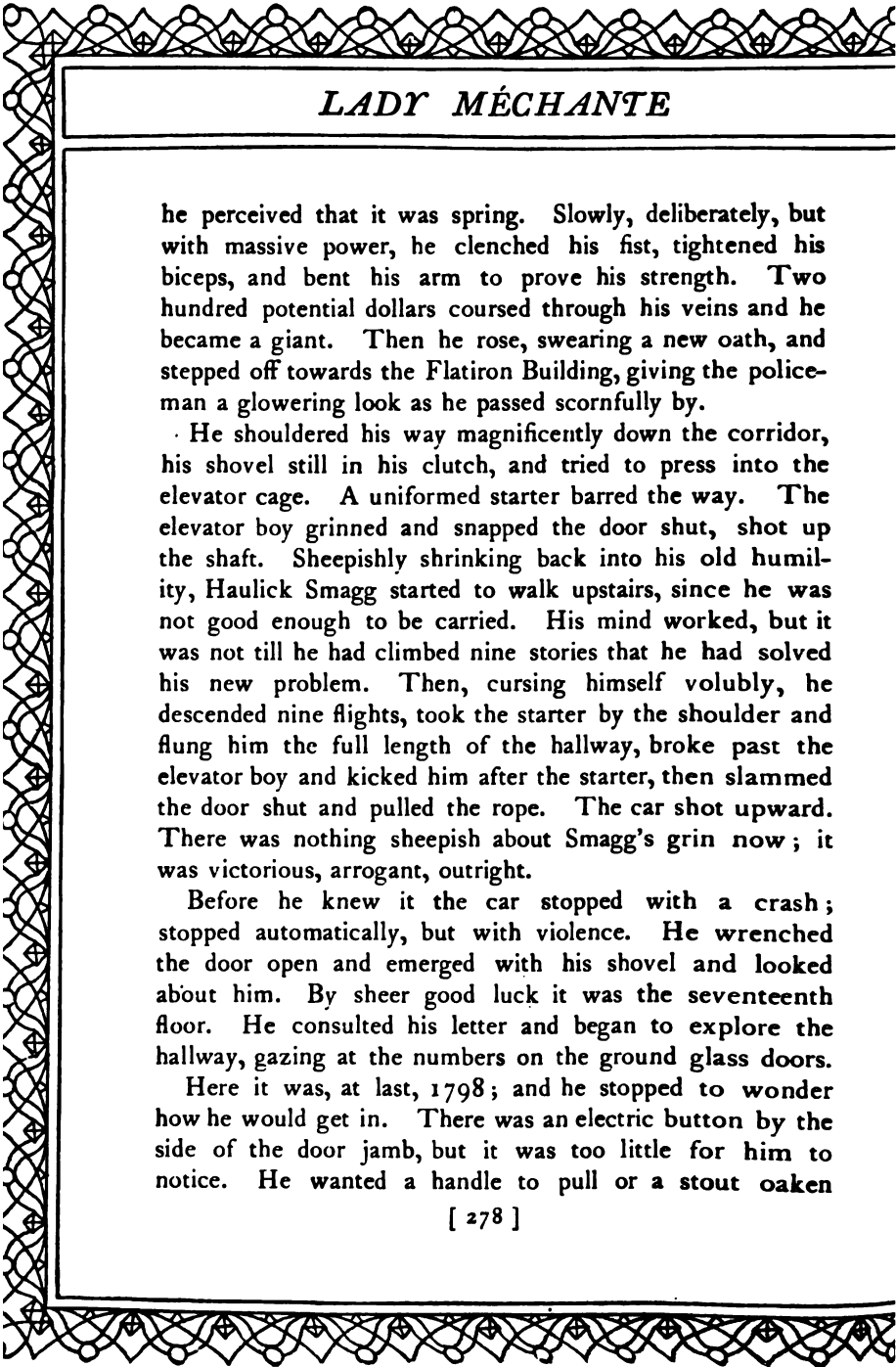
"But perhaps it will take some time," she added. "I think I'd better make an appointment with you for tomorrow. I'll tell you! Come up to my studio at any time tomorrow and tell me all about it, and I'll give you another hundred dollars!"

This was too much. One glass of wine will exhilarate; the second may stupefy. So with money. One hundred had awakened Haulick Smagg's dormant manhood. Two hundred was not so easily digested. He sank back into dumbness, and could only wag his head.

It was enough for Dolly, however, and she opened a red leather bag and drew out a card. Upon it was her name, with the address, "404 Highbrow Hall." He groped for it, as through the dark.

"A hundred dollars!" she said cheerily, nodding at him, and was off before the policeman could take her measure.

There was no need for repetition to stun Haulick Smagg; he was already almost unconscious in contemplation of his fortune. Two hundred dollars! To him it spelled millions — drunks perpetual, an alcoholic epic. He dropped onto a bench to set his dull wits to an unaccustomed labor. His gipsy blood, adjuvant, came to the rescue again, and, pushing at his mind, set it at last in motion. With increasing momentum mere thoughts grew to ideas and ideas to projects. He turned to his neighbor, an old lady with a dewlap and an ash-barrel bonnet, and grinned at her. She hiccoughed and looked at him with bleared eyes. His soul stirred in him. He opened his eyes and saw that the sky was blue; he saw the grass, the trees, the fountain;



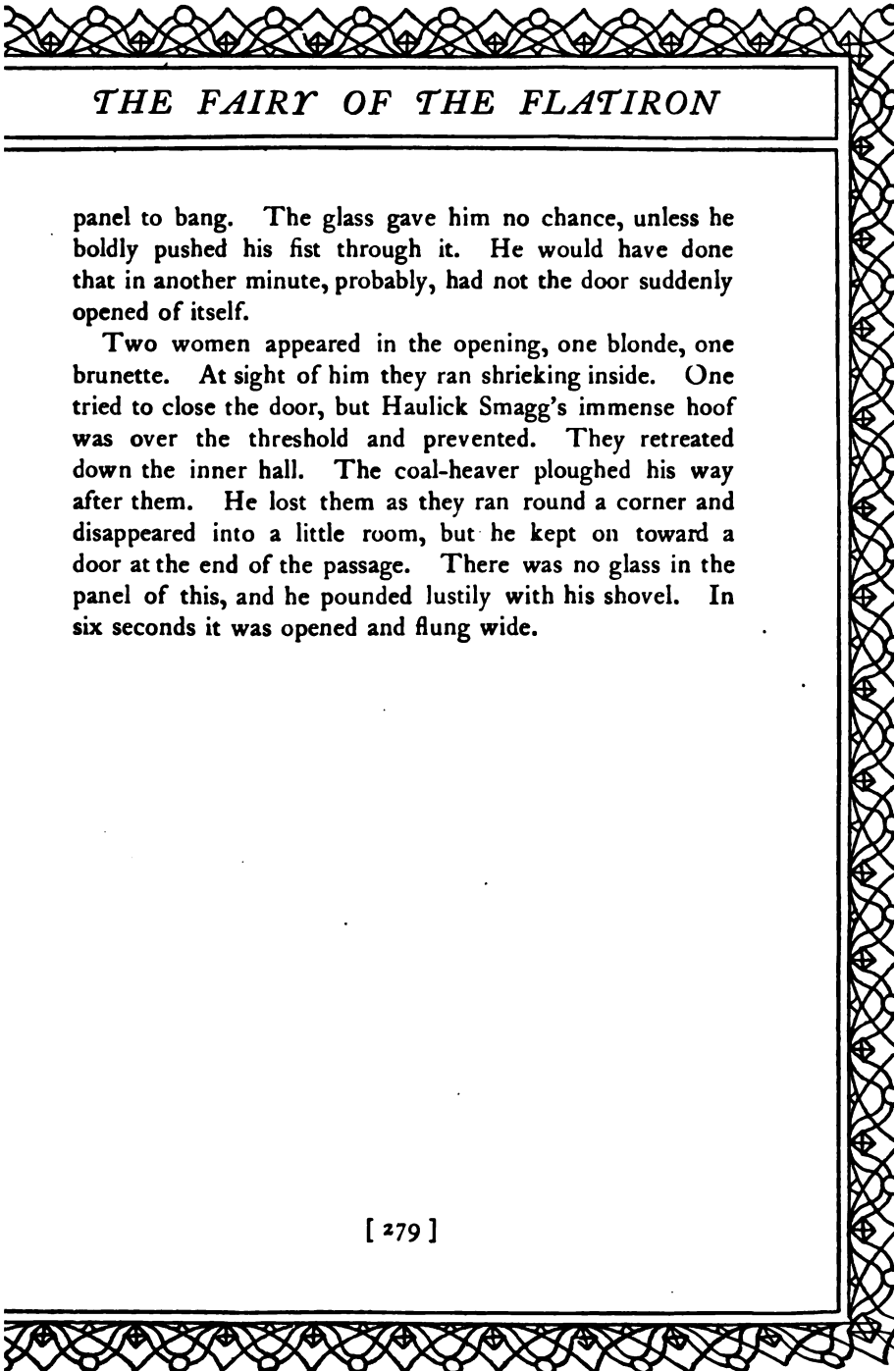
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he perceived that it was spring. Slowly, deliberately, but with massive power, he clenched his fist, tightened his biceps, and bent his arm to prove his strength. Two hundred potential dollars coursed through his veins and he became a giant. Then he rose, swearing a new oath, and stepped off towards the Flatiron Building, giving the policeman a glowering look as he passed scornfully by.

He shouldered his way magnificently down the corridor, his shovel still in his clutch, and tried to press into the elevator cage. A uniformed starter barred the way. The elevator boy grinned and snapped the door shut, shot up the shaft. Sheepishly shrinking back into his old humility, Haulick Smagg started to walk upstairs, since he was not good enough to be carried. His mind worked, but it was not till he had climbed nine stories that he had solved his new problem. Then, cursing himself volubly, he descended nine flights, took the starter by the shoulder and flung him the full length of the hallway, broke past the elevator boy and kicked him after the starter, then slammed the door shut and pulled the rope. The car shot upward. There was nothing sheepish about Smagg's grin now; it was victorious, arrogant, outright.

Before he knew it the car stopped with a crash; stopped automatically, but with violence. He wrenched the door open and emerged with his shovel and looked about him. By sheer good luck it was the seventeenth floor. He consulted his letter and began to explore the hallway, gazing at the numbers on the ground glass doors.

Here it was, at last, 1798; and he stopped to wonder how he would get in. There was an electric button by the side of the door jamb, but it was too little for him to notice. He wanted a handle to pull or a stout oaken



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panel to bang. The glass gave him no chance, unless he boldly pushed his fist through it. He would have done that in another minute, probably, had not the door suddenly opened of itself.

Two women appeared in the opening, one blonde, one brunette. At sight of him they ran shrieking inside. One tried to close the door, but Haulick Smagg's immense hoof was over the threshold and prevented. They retreated down the inner hall. The coal-heaver ploughed his way after them. He lost them as they ran round a corner and disappeared into a little room, but he kept on toward a door at the end of the passage. There was no glass in the panel of this, and he pounded lustily with his shovel. In six seconds it was opened and flung wide.

Chapter Two

SMAGG'S FLORESCENCE

*I am your creature,
And any shape that thou would'st have me wear
I gladly will put on.*

(The Duke of Milan.)



FOR a second time Haulick Smagg was confronted by a lady, but she was no twin to Dolly Van Dream. Even Haulick Smagg apprehended a difference. This one was to the other what Christmas was to Election Day, what a cigarette was to a cigar, what dull red is to pale blue — no such denizen of the world as had walked offtime, tailor-fitted, across the outskirts of his inattention, or had ridden barouched and landaued, with pet dogs and uniformed slaves, along the avenues where he was wont to shovel coal. Unfamiliar as were the habits of Dolly Van Dream to him, and as remote from his comprehension, she was as clear as beer compared with the sprite who now welcomed him with a fairy smile. The most he could be sure of was that he *was* welcomed. The ray of delight she emanated bathed him and refreshed.

The lady has been already described with ambiguous tropes; but who can describe the impression she made upon the rods and cones of Haulick Smagg's retina, the wild attempts of Haulick Smagg's optic nerve to telegraph an impossible translation of the reaction to Haulick Smagg's



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poor brain? He saw, or thought he saw, or dreamed he saw, or, in some unique intoxication, saw, or felt, a creature all gray-and-silver shimmery, slenderly tender, mystic, wrapped in a perfumed mood — a smiling, feminine something that drew him as by a spell and made him glad. Such a costume was as provocative to his imagination as such a face. He glowed and turned faint. There were jewels, too, upon that form; doll's hands and arms, a rapturous throat and neck, and fragrant hair all curls and billows. Slowly, one by one, the details came out of the mist of her presence. He swallowed his tobacco in his pleasant alarm. His shovel dropped upon the floor.

She greeted him as if he had been a long-lost friend, or a rich uncle from Cambodia, dripping rubies. If there were symptoms of surprise, they were hidden on the instant in the chime of her laughter. She laughed for a full minute by the clock, then reeled to a chair and laughed again. At last she rose with more dignity and held forth her hand.

"I'm delighted to see you," she said. "Do sit down and tell me your name. I presume you came in answer to my message."

"I came for that hundred dollars," said Haulick Smagg, and his voice growled and grumbled through the room.

She jumped up as if she had been touched off with a match, and exploded again into laughter. Then from her escritoire she drew the missing portion of the bank note and tendered it.

He plucked it from her, scrutinized it, and matched it with the other half, which had lain hidden in his fist. A smile broke through the gloom of grime on his face, and the two fragments, reunited at last, were closed in upon by the fin-



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gers of his big right hand. From that moment, even to the end, the money never left his grasp.

She motioned him to a seat, straightened her face, and spoke to him. "Who are you, Vulcan?"

"Haulick Smagg. I'm a coal-heaver. I worked for Blackstone and Company, but I was fired today. What do you want, anyway?"

"What do I want? I want *you*, Blackamoor! Not till a minute ago did I know what I *did* want, but now I know."

Something of this got into the mire of his brain and stirred him; he rose, black and mighty, and lurched a few steps nearer her. She evaded him like a sunbeam and laughed again. "Sit down," she commanded, and a new note in her voice took away his strength. He dropped like a carcass into a chair.

"Let me think," she murmured. "It was my whim to play with Fate, to win Destiny to my side, to challenge Fortune rather than play my wit in my first encounter with this town. I sent my message to Chance and you were the answer, it seems." She looked at him from under her golden brows fixedly. "What do you mean, I wonder?"

"What d'you mean yourself?" He crossed his long legs.

She still stared at him and continued: "I take you, Caliban; I take you, shirt and shovel, cap and clumsiness, dirt, dust, and cinders. No, I forswear the coal dust. I'll have you laundered." She rose and shook a finger at him. "And then, by Frankenstein, I'll make and model you — I'll tool you over and file you down, pump a soul into you, infuse you with fame. I'll finance and exploit you, and set you walking up Broadway. Come, would you like to

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be reborn? Would you flower, Monster? Would you cajole a metropolis?"

He looked awkwardly about him. "Got any beer?" he said.

She walked to a cabinet, took down a curious netted flask and poured a high-waisted glassful and handed it to him like Circe. It was down in an instant. He almost bit the glass, then smacked his lips and heaved a sigh.

Now she dared approach him, and her gaze was that of a snake.

"I have you!" she whispered. "*Forget!*" She extended her fore and little fingers.

There was no visible effect at first. His wild eyeballs still roved the room. His tongue was still seen cuddling the roof of his mouth for the last flavor of the liquor; but as she stared at him he shrunk a little and his personality grew less insistent. He did not know yet that he was conquered, and tried at intervals to talk. But gradually peace enveloped him; his muscles relaxed, all but those that held his fingers tight about his fortune. With a gesture of sudden shame his greasy cap came off, his left hand awkwardly stroked his hair, he attempted furtively to kick his coal shovel out of sight.

The lady's gaze softened now, and she curled herself into a corner of a huge divan. She still watched him, but her curiosity seemed constructive, as if she travailed with his recreation. Her brows sprang in a tense arch; her forehead puckered; a smile came and went, evanescent; her nostrils dilated once in a while, as if impulsed by some new, bolder whim.

"The land of possibilities," she murmured, "the city of solecisms! What path shall your feet tread, my amiable



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ogre? What walls shall you destroy for me, my battering ram? When you are painted and powdered, when you are frocked and finished, where shall I ride you roughshod? What prestige shall harness you wherewith to haul my chariot? Oh, well, it suffices that the game is begun." She stretched herself and yawned. "Now for the christening!"

She went to the telephone and called up the tonsorial establishment on the eleventh floor.

"Send two big barbers," she commanded, "with soap and towels, razors, scissors, combs, a quart of violet water, and a ton of energy. I pay by the hour." She hung up and went back to the couch.

If Haulick Smagg was drunk, it was a new form of intoxication. Rather was it a dorming dream he was sunk in, or a manner of psychological enchantment. But the very air he breathed bewildered him. New sights dazzled him. The apparition on the couch seduced his mood. All had been strange since noon; all grew steadily stranger. He was off the earth now, without mental foothold, without experience, without knowledge of this quaint form of existence. It was easier not to think, not to wonder, not to look forward. He drifted as if in sleep, lulled, beatified, non-expectant, serene. Blackstone's coal yard receded towards infinity. Ten minutes before, his heaven lay in Beer. He had reveled in the prospect of a ten days' carouse, of which the hundred-dollar bill in his hand was prophet. Even that joyous future now lost color and grew dim in this transcendent well-being; but he held to the money in his fist, nevertheless, though he cared little and less every moment whether or not that egg of hope ever hatched.

These hazy, vagrom speculations ceased suddenly at



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the entrance of two white-clothed hair-dressers. He was fallen upon forthwith and dragged incontinently into the bathroom and ordered to strip.

He wondered vaguely where his will had gone, that he obeyed with such docility. A colloquy came to him through the keyhole, as his hostess gave her orders with precision. He had time but to hide his hundred dollars in his mouth, when the room was filled with steam and flying spray; a torrent of waters hissed and bubbled; a warm, wet wave lapped his sticky skin; his eyes were full of soap; bare, brawny arms brandished brushes; Italian exclamatives astounded his ears; his skin, lathered and scrubbed, grew smooth and slippery; his ears filled with water. It went on seemingly for hours, bristles biting his head and legs and back. Then there came the sudden shock of an ice-cold flood freezing his flesh, and he shrank under the ordeal. Next, he was slapped and rubbed with towels, swaddled with soft linen. His skin tingled and glowed, and a new life shot into him. It was pleasant now to feel the click of scissors in his hair, the smooth, sweet stroke of the razor on his cheek, the deft touches of the file and buffer on his nails. The odor of violets was fragrant about him, a conciliatory powder-puff played gently over his chin. He grew young and younger, sweeter and more soft.



But through the flood and suds, the wiping and the polishing, still his mouth caged his bank note, a wad of wet paper. It prevented speech, but speech was unnecessary. The barbers worked upon him like sculptors on a block of marble, fashioning a man. Nor protestation nor entreaty could move them, and Haulick Smagg submitted to the inevitable.

When he was dry and shiny, his hair parted and his

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moustache gone, he was supported into an adjacent chamber, where, set out in orderly arrangement on a table, new raiment awaited him. Underwear of hitherto unknown form and texture, hosiery of impossible sheen, neckwear of simple chastity, trousers, waistcoat and coat whose shape astonished him, all were hung and buttoned upon him. The process was long and intricate, but when Haulick Smagg, complete and *cap-à-pie*, approached a cheval glass with timorous apprehension, he met a stranger resembling, to his mind, some plausible villain of some Bowery melodrama. That it was indeed he himself did not occur to him for several minutes. The image perplexed him, and he turned away to accustom himself to strange weights and surfaces, tight feelings here and there in zones that had all his life been free. There was a cool stiffness about his wrists, a brittle, crackling plane encasing his chest. His feet were bound with new stresses and new strains; his cheeks and chin felt naked; his pockets were all wrong and empty. Yet, strangely, he liked the sensation. Nothing about him reminded him of Haulick Smagg, but he felt a tolerant, friendly interest in himself, as in a stranger who might invite him, possibly, to take a drink. Thus amiably constrained, he was pushed by the two barbers into the reception room and left alone with his expectant hostess.

It is the test of excellency in any profession not to be branded by one's occupation so as to be infallibly recognized as of it. Haulick Smagg was too much of an artist in coal-heaving to show, especially in his rehabilitation, the slightest trace of his trade. Lean and gaunt he was, with high cheek bones and smallish, violet eyes. His hands were large and bony, his feet long and wide. With the coal dust washed off, his face showed keenly alert,



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almost intelligent. When he smiled, there was a charm about him like the charm of a child, compelling, irresistible. In short, as he stood there, immaculate and tailored, there was subtle evidence in his being of an inchoate personality that might prove susceptible and sensitive in its reaction upon environment.

Let us not scrutinize Lady Méchante's methods with her protégé too closely. How she wormed herself into his brain, tightened a screw here, strung a wire there, drove a few nails to hang thoughts on, and installed a few primary principles of etiquette and culture, need not be disclosed. Scrub and shave a stevedore yourself, and you will find how amenable he is to formative processes when immaculate and rehabilitated. Lady Méchante was patient and persevering and inspired with a sense of humor. Her patient breathed pure oxygen in her presence, and was stimulated till he vibrated with overtones. So one may string a coconut shell with catgut and a master's bow may call forth harmonies.

His first tuitions were practical and utilitarian; a dash of persiflage, an epigram, a lively limerick or two, and the art of complimenting a lady without having his face slapped, came later in the game. He was taught to enter a room less like a giraffe than a gazelle. He was taught to leave it with a trail of fire. Not to be too interested nor too bored, to preserve the fine natural distinction of his personality, — these and other graces she instilled in words of one syllable.

Then, rudiments of art and culture she taught him, primary working axioms, the maxims of the elect. She taught him to say, wistfully, after an egregious piano solo



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had finished, "What *is* that?" She taught him how to criticize pictures without being caught, how to use "convincing" and "sincere." She disclosed the mysterious art of evading invitations. She showed him the three answers to the awful inquiry: "How d' you do, Mr. Smagg! — you don't remember me, *do* you?" She resolved him, in fact, the patter of the *cognoscenti*, the shibboleths of the inner few. So in music, so in art, etiquette, and literature; maxims, a well-selected phrase-book, enough to carry him up the first flight of stairs in the abode of Æsthetics.

In all this his fly-paper memory let no word escape. What he could not understand he learned by rote and practiced like a machine; but no one would have known the difference.

How did she gain his complaisance? There was something of glamour, something of hypnotic suggestion in it. The exotic atmosphere induced a mood of dream. The novelty of his environment acted on him subtly like radium upon a diamond. His elements suffered allotropic modification. Not that he realized any of this. He was led like a steer to the butcher. He groped dimly forward as if through jelly. It was enough for him the first evening that, though he was fed with strange viands at a little pink-lit table and irrigated with rare vintages, at the end he still had his hundred-dollar bill, now not clutched in his horny palm, but safe ensconced in a corner of his white waistcoat pocket. His clothes upheld him with dignity like the armor of a knight. If Lady Méchante turned aside to giggle on occasion at his legerdemain with knife or spoon, his jugglery with mushrooms, he did not perceive the cause. Once started on his career, his patience and willingness were pathetic.



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She did not let him go, however, without the rehearsal of a dialogue that was to ensue upon the morrow. Already the story of his meeting with Miss Van Dream had been corkscrewed out of him between the fish and the entrée. Mr. Smagg, with his thick tongue loosened with Chateau Yquem (he damned it under his breath, as having "too much sugar into it," but drank it nevertheless), struggled valorously with a description of the girl till his hostess screamed with glee. She gleaned from the expected interview a hope of conquest. By that her scheme would be made easy; so Smagg was put through the paces he was to step at the studio in a polite dialogue fraught with an occult policy.

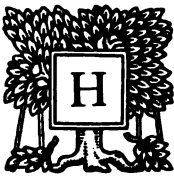
At midnight Haulier Smagg, still in evening clothes, still with a faint odor of violets upon him, descended the elevator of the Flatiron Building the bonded slave of my Lady Méchante. It was dangerous to let him loose to rove alone in search, perhaps, of his heaven of beer, but it could not be helped. Destiny had sent him; let Destiny guide him safe. His instructions, carefully written upon heliotrope notepaper, sent him across the street to the nearest hotel. This he entered, and here he took a room. A half-hour later, Lady Méchante, her head out of her seventeenth-story window, questioning the night, imagined she could hear his snores.

Chapter Three

HIGHBROW HALL

*Nay then, I see that thou art but a puisne
In the subtle mystery of a woman.*

(The Revenger's Tragedy.)



HIGHBROW HALL is like a huge sponge, in whose multitudinous labyrinthine holes are housed the maddest cranks in the city of New York. It is the abode of a thousand freaks. There are over twelve hundred suites of apartments in this big, blonde building, and each room contains an inmate insaner than the next.

A mass of intricate, hard-paved, cross-cut corridors and tunnels—twelve stories of catacombs, covering heaven knows how many acres in extent. To traverse its mysterious halls and staircases is like threading the returning, elusive vagaries of a nightmare.

The halls are usually deserted, but not silent, for of a sudden, if it be Sunday morning for instance, the whole fabric groans and trembles with the titanic vibrations of an orchestra pent in some small room in the secret entrails of the house, and the mellow pounding of kettledrums fills every artery of the place; while quaintly above the strains of Palestrina echo from some jubilant choral society over your head.



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“Curfews Shall Not Ring Tonight!” have at you through keyholes, from mad pupils of mad elocutionary teachers, and as for “Papa’s Letters,” why, they sweep them up in dozens in the hallways every morning!

Artistic to the bone are the Highbrows. Art comes high in this asylum, but one must have it. Maids and widows who paint on plush and placque, by their hair you shall know them. Starving musicians and teachers sublet and double sublet their rooms, their pianos, their reputations, and, forced from their lairs and Lares “from 1 to 3 on Tue., Thu. and Sat.,” are forced to walk the streets. Frail girls chum together in one room, suspicious with Japanese screens and couches, behind which one dares not look for fear of finding a cook-stove or bath. Where in heaven’s name do they sleep? In the grand piano? Beware of any particularly plausible-looking bookcase — ask no questions of oak bureaus whose drawers will not open. What economies are dovetailed into this pile! What illicit cuisines! What bathrooms made over into pantries or nurseries! Children? One sees them in the kindergarten on the ninth floor only. Their mothers are above in the gymnasium, taking lessons in golf. There are no homes in Highbrow Hall — only studios.

There are Schools of Dramatic Art, too; and women journalists, where they read “papers,” as women will, and discuss them over tea; where it is “sociable,” thanks to the presence of men in bygone collars and white satin embroidered ties, contributors, they, to the weeklies of the Middle West.

But we are not half down the corridor yet. We pass a few assorted poets, supported by wives who give “talks” at three dollars per listener. If she does n’t talk Hegel, or



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Verlaine, or the newest Neo-Celtic poet, she talks Veroni, and the influence of the earlier post-Raphaelites, or she monologues away on Brahms, and discloses the architecture of the Sonata with two grand pianos and eight-handed "ensembles." It is most exciting; especially when you're in the corner of the couch with the pretty geniurette from Kansas City and don't have to listen.

And then, if you would bite the other side of the social pie, the true upper crust of Highbrow Hall, come with me to a very devilish little musicale in the northeast corner, down a secret passage, unsuspected and remote. Here, now, is the truly smart set — dollared dowagers and men with prefixes to their names (if they would only use them), artists who receive five hundred a night for singing at aristocratic palaces, Viennese swells, and the ultimate affectations in Art, if not in Society. Here, also, are a few timorously wicked débutantes and ladies-who-would-be-thought-clever being initiated into the most select circles of Bohemia. It is a place which one boasts of having been invited to, and shudders prettily at having gone. Your host is the spoiled pet of the hour. You may be assured that the Buda-Pesth street ballad he exploits languidly, with naughty, half-shut eyes and alluring smile, is unspeakably *risqué*. Here Mrs. Munich, for whom every man in the room has a confessed *tendresse*, plays shivery Hungarian waltzes, retarding the time voluptuously with suggestive abandon, while you become hysterically confidential with your partner over the *marrons glacés*, and she, under the demoralizing influence of such fantastic harmonies, ventures to smoke half of a perfumed Petroff cigarette. Here reigns the Effete, where it is always the end-of-the-century.



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It was in such an exotic environment that Miss Dolly Van Dream's studio was placed, a secret nook at the end of a long tunnel-like corridor, up two steps and round a corner on the avenue front. Within, one entered through a small hall to a sort of dining-room, well stocked with old oaken furniture, whence one could see through a wide arch the vast two-story *atelier*.

The apartment was suspiciously commodious for the scant use Dolly made of it ; but any such suspicions were futile. Dolly really painted, and that alone was crime enough to her world, for in the social structure of the town the Van Dreams dwelt very near the top. Not quite at the top, however, for their name permeated the society columns and Dystart Van Dream was a millionaire, so called. There were those who questioned the "Van," and Dystart's grandfather was said to have been a cabin boy. Their position, nevertheless, was what is called "assured," and Dolly, who had made a name for herself on account of the accidental surplus of brains accorded her, was looked upon only with tolerant amusement when she took up the artistic life. Dolly's fads were well known, and this was by no means her first. She had, in a way, taken her cue from Mrs. Braxton-Burlap of Boston, and was a constant source of "copy" for the yellow journals. She was at present still famous for having ventured alone into New York in August wearing a taupe veil. It was not the fact that she was unaccompanied, or even the taupe veil, that made the story : it was because there was nobody in New York except Dolly Van Dream and three or four millions of nameless ones. In virtue of these eccentricities she dwelt upon the borderland between Bohemia and Philistia ; her studio was a sort of Debatable Ground where the guide-

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boards pointed in both directions. Here were found both manners and customs; the one coming down from Society, the other coming up from Art. Here débutantes had shivered in the presence of genius, and talent had trembled at the proximity of wealth.

It was as near like the professional studio as Dolly could make it, the studio of the successful artist, the studio of a thousand amateur stories in the ten-cent magazines, with tapestries, old wooden carvings, embroidered altar cloths, and all that sort of thing, you know. Dolly's canvases stood on the floor turned face to the wall. Dolly's purchases, in genuine Georgian frames, classic nudes and impressionist landscapes, filled the vertical acreage.

It was the hour for tea and a precious poet or two, and perhaps a painter, in Dolly Van Dream's studio. A tremendous bang on the door startled the *tête-à-tête* at the teatable into a sharp surprise. Dolly stared and Dante Lilliput stared, and the maid ran to the door. There was a colloquy of which only the bass half was heard, then a visitor tramped heavily through the dining-room and appeared in the archway. Miss Van Dream rose, took a step forward, and gazed with puzzled curiosity.

A frock-suit and a pair of large, varnished boots came forward to meet her, propelled by a creature who seemed to have little part in them, so strangely they sat upon him. The man seemed reluctant, but the frock-coat was perfectly willing and agreeable. The frock-coat could not speak; neither, for a moment, could Haulick Smagg, and Dolly Van Dream, absolutely at a loss to account for his presence, stood staring at him for a moment. She could not recognize the prodigy, of course; if he had brought his shovel with him, now, it



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might have been different. But at last she reached out a hand to him hesitantly, and said: "Why—how do you do? How *nice* of you to come! You're *just* in time for tea."

"Thank you," said Mr. Smagg, and he wrung her hand with a terrible grip. Then he swallowed violently, turned his eyes to the wall, caught sight of the picture of a nude female with an orange, and blushed.

This gave Dolly Van Dream no clue to his identity. She tried it again.

"It's a long time since I've seen you."

"Thank you. Didn't you want me to come? You said so yesterday."

It was now Dolly's turn to blush. She did it the more prettily.

"Yesterday?" she repeated.

"You gave me the torn hundred-dollar bill, you know, and the letter."

"Oh!" Dolly Van Dream looked at him with a new pair of eyes as if at a toadstool turned orchid. "Really? Are *you* the man? Why, I thought—oh, I see! Something *did* happen, then?" She looked him up and she looked him down, while his eyes roved stealthily about the room.

"Thank you." He threw it at her, all he could recall that might fit, waiting for another cue.

"Do sit down and tell me all about it!" Dolly pointed to a chair and to the minor poet, then hesitated. "It's awkward, but I can't quite recall your name."

"Haulick Smagg." He dropped into the chair with a thud.

"Oh, Mr. Lilliput, let me present Mr. Smagg. He's



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just had a curious experience. Now *do* tell me about it, Mr. Smagg."

His answer came as from an automaton, as he tried to remember Lady Méchante's phrases. His mind held fear at the strangeness of his situation, but its very difficulty prevented his collapse. He had a part to perform, and there was something in the will of the brute that urged him on, though it was like walking a tight rope in the dark. He groped mentally for his mistress's hand to guide him; mentally he shut his eyes and plodded dully forward, why, he knew not, unless, indeed, it were for the hundred-dollar bill that Miss Van Dream had promised him and which he had promised not to accept.

He shut his eyes in order to concentrate his attention and declaimed: "You thought I was a coal-heaver. I ain't a coal-heaver. Sociologist. Studying the Submerged Tenth. Investigating the drinking habits of the lower classes. Collecting data for three years. My thesis for a Doctor's degree. 'The Lower Classes attain their Maximum Capacity for Alcoholic Beverages on Tuesdays at 7.16 P. M. Minimum on Fridays at 3.05 A. M.' I plot statistics collected by actual personal research. Diagrams, showing diurnal inebriety on cross-section paper, show bibacity-curve of equation, $x^2 \times y = 2 G$. 'G' is weekly income."

How relieved he was now he had got it out! He opened his eyes and looked about him. Dolly Van Dream was gazing wonderingly. Mr. Lilliput had his mouth open, and his false teeth gleamed.

"What a *splendid* work!" she ejaculated. "Is n't it, Mr. Lilliput? Why, it ought to solve the whole drink problem, surely! But I confess I can't quite see yet how the theory can be applied."



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“Applied” was his cue for something — but what? He had forgotten, but he made a brave attempt.

“Only an advertising scheme,” he ventured.

Now, this was the answer to a wholly different question, as he perceived dimly by Miss Van Dream’s expression. He was quite over his head now and struggled madly. “It is quite natural that you should be amazed,” he brought out; a remark which should have come earlier in the conversation.

Dolly was indubitably amazed, and her curiosity was still unsatisfied. “But what happened in the Flatiron Building?” she inquired.

“The collection of statistics and plotting of tendency-curves is an end, not a means, in the science of Sociology. Ten diagrams make one doctor’s degree.” He looked up in triumph. What if he had his replies mixed? His gipsy memory had not failed in his phrasing.

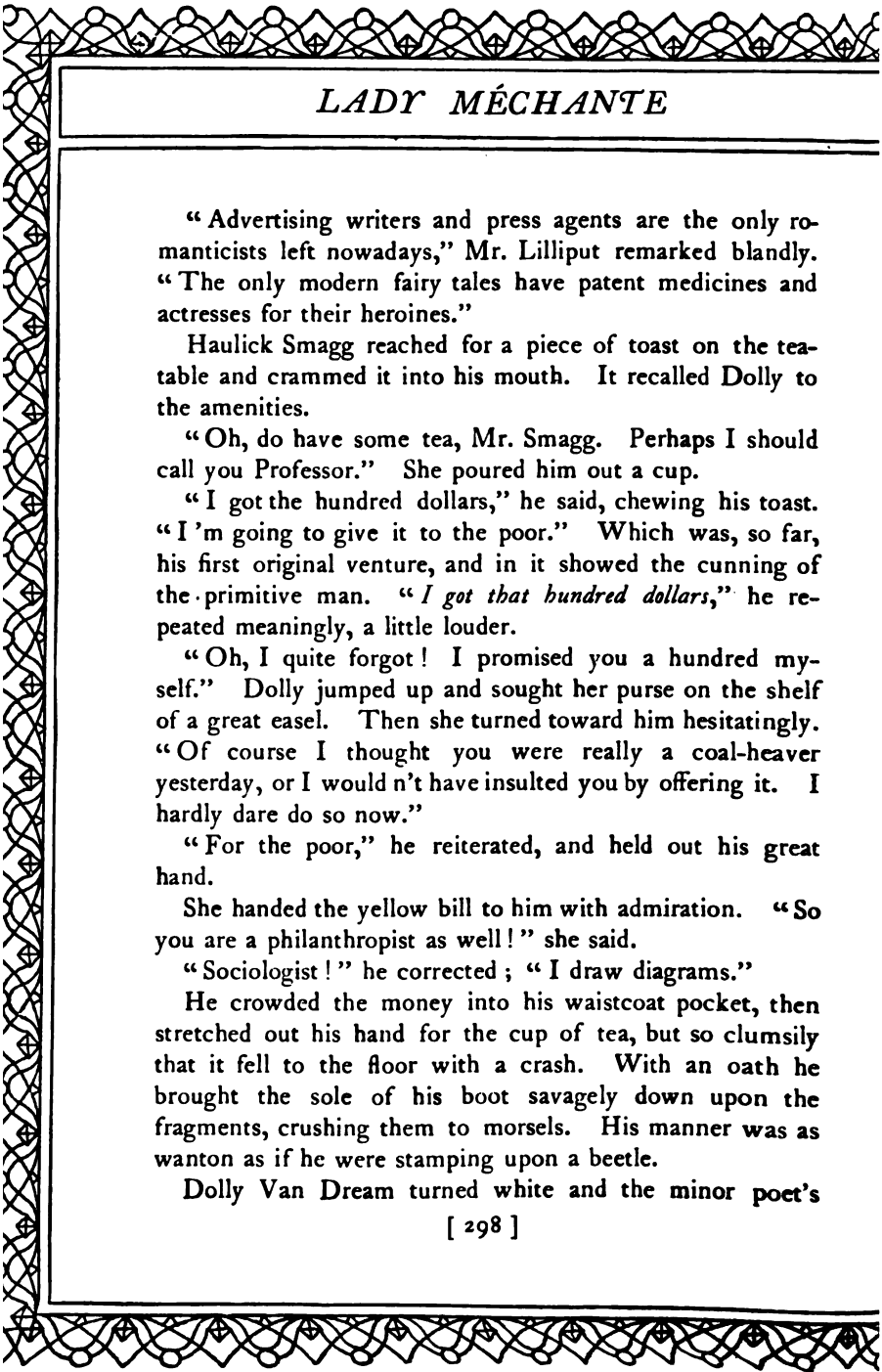
Mr. Lilliput was obviously impressed. “I say,” he exclaimed, “you ought to get a jolly good lot of material down there. Human nature in the rough and all that sort of thing. I never saw a drunken man in my life!”

Haulick Smagg turned his head, gazed at the poet, and spoke: “Well, *you* won’t be a man till you get full, I’ll tell you that!” He added something further about a “maggot,” but it was lost in a growl.

Dolly pieced it out to suit herself. “So you were really in disguise yesterday?” she said. “How interesting and romantic! But did you get the other half of the hundred-dollar bill? Do tell me just what happened.”

“New brand of soap. They wanted a name. I told ‘em ‘Latherine.’”

“Oh, I see.” Dolly sighed.



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“Advertising writers and press agents are the only romanticists left nowadays,” Mr. Lilliput remarked blandly. “The only modern fairy tales have patent medicines and actresses for their heroines.”

Haulick Smagg reached for a piece of toast on the tea-table and crammed it into his mouth. It recalled Dolly to the amenities.

“Oh, do have some tea, Mr. Smagg. Perhaps I should call you Professor.” She poured him out a cup.

“I got the hundred dollars,” he said, chewing his toast. “I’m going to give it to the poor.” Which was, so far, his first original venture, and in it showed the cunning of the primitive man. “*I got that hundred dollars,*” he repeated meaningly, a little louder.

“Oh, I quite forgot! I promised you a hundred myself.” Dolly jumped up and sought her purse on the shelf of a great easel. Then she turned toward him hesitatingly. “Of course I thought you were really a coal-heaver yesterday, or I would n’t have insulted you by offering it. I hardly dare do so now.”

“For the poor,” he reiterated, and held out his great hand.

She handed the yellow bill to him with admiration. “So you are a philanthropist as well!” she said.

“Sociologist!” he corrected; “I draw diagrams.”

He crowded the money into his waistcoat pocket, then stretched out his hand for the cup of tea, but so clumsily that it fell to the floor with a crash. With an oath he brought the sole of his boot savagely down upon the fragments, crushing them to morsels. His manner was as wanton as if he were stamping upon a beetle.

Dolly Van Dream turned white and the minor poet’s



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eyebrows rose, shocked at an expression of real emotion. But Haulick Smagg, having vented his wrath, grew mild again. He took the second cup of tea which Dolly poured for him hurriedly, emptied it into his saucer and gulped it down audibly. Then, infused with strength and courage, he looked about him. Singling out a landscape, an impressionistic mosaic of colored dabs, he thrust out his thumb and wiggled it with a technical gesture.

“Lot of bully good stuff in that,” he said, with a magnificent effect of sagacity. “I like this part in *here*.” His thumb described a small semicircle. “A bit tricky, though.”

This reinstated him. “I’m so glad you like it,” said Dolly. “You really are discriminating. I hardly dare to show you my own work, but I *would* like your opinion. Do tell me what you think of this. It’s only a study, you know. Tell me frankly.” She turned over a canvas, showing in bold, vigorous brush-work the half-done head and shoulders of a silk-clad girl.

He stared at it and clutched his chin with his fist. What was it Lady Méchante had said? There was a master key she had given him by which he might pick the lock of any social dilemma. Oh yes. “There was once a fox,” he began slowly, wagging his head.

“Oh, if it’s as bad as that, for heaven’s sake don’t tell me!” Quickly she turned the canvas about. “My, you *are* shrewd! You have discovered the very thing. I knew it all along, of course, and it is just because I *did* know it I wanted to be told it was n’t so.”

Dante Lilliput sat up and took notice. One could almost see him scribbling something down in a little notebook for future use.

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As for Haulick Smagg, he was profoundly satisfied with himself. He was dabbling in magic. He understood it not one whit, but his power was pleasant. This little victory gave him the nerve to walk up and boldly inspect the nudes, something he had wanted to do ever since he entered the apartment. A glance back over his shoulder showed him that even this was permissible. He ranged from one to another, then reluctantly examined a piece of still life representing a dead fish, a dozen onions, and two dishpans. There was one last remark in his catalogue. He recalled that it had to be effected with his hands in his pockets and his head on one side. He assumed the attitude and risked it.

“Good,” he said, “but why do it?”

He scored a bullseye. “You *terrible* man!” said Dolly Van Dream. “You know *everything*! Now do come back and be sociable, before you destroy everything in my studio. Mr. Lilliput was just going to read me one of his poems.”

Smagg made for his chair, and, dazed with his success so far, could not resist the temptation to try another of the maxims he had rehearsed with his tutor. Three or four remarks about pictures she had taught him, one or two on music and architecture. What was that about poetry? “The worst thing about blank verse is that it’s usually so damned blank.”

He tried it. Trite as it was, it had been funny before, often enough, and might be again, as Lady Méchante knew. But this time its only apparent effect was to make the minor poet jam his manuscript back into his pocket and change it for another.

“You are terribly modern, Mr. Smagg,” said Dolly.



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“Have n’t you any room for the classic in your soul? Mr. Lilliput is of the neo-Greek school.”

“I *am* the neo-Greek school!” said Dante Lilliput. “I stand for the voluptuousness of sound, for colored words and phrases, for perfumed cadences and the mellifluous consecration of vowels.”

“Let me feel your muscle,” said Smagg, starting to his feet. He reached out a paw and gripped the biceps of the minor poet till he drew forth a stifled shriek. “Go on!” he muttered. “You ain’t got no more’n a cockroach. Look at this!” He took a fork in one hand and bent it till it looked like a sugar tongs, then tossed it through the archway. Then, suddenly, he wished he had not done it, and he grinned sillily. Lady Méchante’s invisible finger beckoned him to safety.

“Miss Van Dream,” he said, “I have associated so long with the lower classes that really I have forgotten how to behave. I beg your pardon.”

Again the spell worked, and the effect steadied him. He was, during the whole call, like a somnambulist traversing a perilous path, now hypnotically sure of his footing, now suddenly awakening to a cognizance of dizzy heights. So he changed from moods of security to sudden embarrassments and fears. His first essays at repartee had been timorously delivered, but he grew to an increasing faith in the counsels of his mistress. He felt dimly that his security lay in a blind acquiescence to her *dicta*, to say nothing original, to watch for his cue. Yet, from time to time, the natural man asserted himself and his spirit broke loose.

Dante Lilliput had drawn a typewritten manuscript from his pocket, and, urged by Dolly Van Dream’s honeyed compliments, had begun to read. His voice flowed evenly; the



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drawn-out vowels were given quantity rather than accent ; the lines were intoned monotonously with deep intensity, as if each word were displayed and valued, a jewel upon a necklace. His feathery head wagged as he spoke :

“ Last night I slept with Rhodomonte,
With Rhodomonte the fair, and she was dead !
Cold were her breasts
As last year’s nests,
And weary, weary hung her tired head.
How should I know that Rhodomonte was dead ?
Was she more cold
Than e’er of old ?
Was she more languid than when oft I said,
‘ God, how I love you, Rhodomonte ! ’
Last night I slew my Rhodomonte,
Slew Rhodomonte the fair, and she is dead ! ”

Dolly Van Dream jumped to her feet. “ Splendid ! ” she cried. “ What power, what feeling, what daring ! Ah, that is poetry, indeed, is it not, Mr. Smagg ? ”

Haulick Smagg had, during the recitation, succeeded in catching a fly in his fist and was now busy pulling off its wings. He looked up guiltily and sought in his phrase book.

“ ‘ Take care of the sounds, and the sense will take care of itself,’ said Alice.” He feared he had got it backwards, but it was too late.

“ My theory exactly,” said Dante Lilliput. “ Take care of the passion and the person will take care of herself, too.”

“ Yes,” sighed Miss Van Dream. “ One’s person does n’t matter. It’s a wonderful piece of symbolism, I think. Rhodomonte ! How well I know her, how well we *all* know her, everyone who has lived and loved ! ”





HIGHBROW HALL

While the others took up the thread of their conversation, Smagg composed himself to a passive rôle and studied the mild, sane tonalities of the academic oils about him. Work like this he had seen often enough hung over glittering bars, lithographed on calendars, pasted on the sides of tomato tins, man's feeble attempt to impress the retina as nature itself impresses it; to do, many, many degrees below in tone, what the sunlight did. He saw the attempts to capture the transitory effect of things, accidental illuminations whose shadows and half-lights concealed or distorted the actual form, the immemorial scholastic attempt to reproduce mere charm. Every painting presented a petty, subjective point of view, pictured in heavy pigment, each one a deification of the casual, the obvious, the temporary. All this he saw, but, seeing, did not yet understand. He accepted it as right and proper in its correlation with the unknown qualities of an unknown culture. He accepted it as he had accepted his frock-coat. That was the consistent costume, these the consistent properties and scenery for the undreamed-of drama in which he figured. He was still in the dark, but when the light should begin to come to him he was to perceive new ideas as a babe sees new objects, without perspective or distance or size. What was near to him now seemed big and potent.

Dante Lilliput meanwhile had let himself go and grew lyric. "Oh, there's nothing worth writing about but love. I love love! It's the greatest of all the arts. It is as necessary to a man of genius as fuel is to a fire. What could I do without women, or what could women do without me? Do you know, there's one curious district in this city like a little foreign island where I don't know a single woman!

LADY MÉCHANTE

It is between Seventy-second Street and Seventy-ninth, west of Broadway. On West Seventy-first Street there's a girl named Rose who is a perfect violet. On Eightieth Street there's a girl named Violet who is a perfect rose. But between the two there's a vast, arid waste where not a woman knows me, where not a woman loves me! Oh, I never dine alone. There's always some fresh young thing who loves to look up at me and hear my voice."

"You do read your poems very well," said Dolly.

"Oh, I can't do them justice unless I'm holding a girl's hand. If you would let me hold your hand, now, I'll recite my 'Abnegation.' I always need a woman's hand to sustain me and give me magnetism. I need sympathy. I need the tremor of the soul, you know—the polarity of sex."

He reached forward and took her hand in his velvet grasp, rubbing his thumb along the back of her hand as he recited with vibrant, suppressed passion:

"Sweet! If thy feet
Trample my bosom in scornfulness,
Why would my mournfulness
Teach me deceit?"

"Pure! As the starlight is sure,
My love would accept thy duplicity,
Faint with felicity
So to endure!"

"It really does thrill me," sighed Dolly. "Why, I can feel it pulsing in my finger tips as you speak. How one gets your heart-beats!"

"Gawd!" cried Smagg, jumping up. "I'm sick. Sick



HIGHBROW HALL

as a horse." He laid his tremendous hand against his stomach, and his eyes rolled up.

"What's the matter? Don't you like it?" the poet asked stiffly.

"It's that damn drink there. I ain't used to swallowing slops like that."

"Would you like a little Scotch?" Dolly asked.

"Huh?"

"I have some Scotch whiskey here."

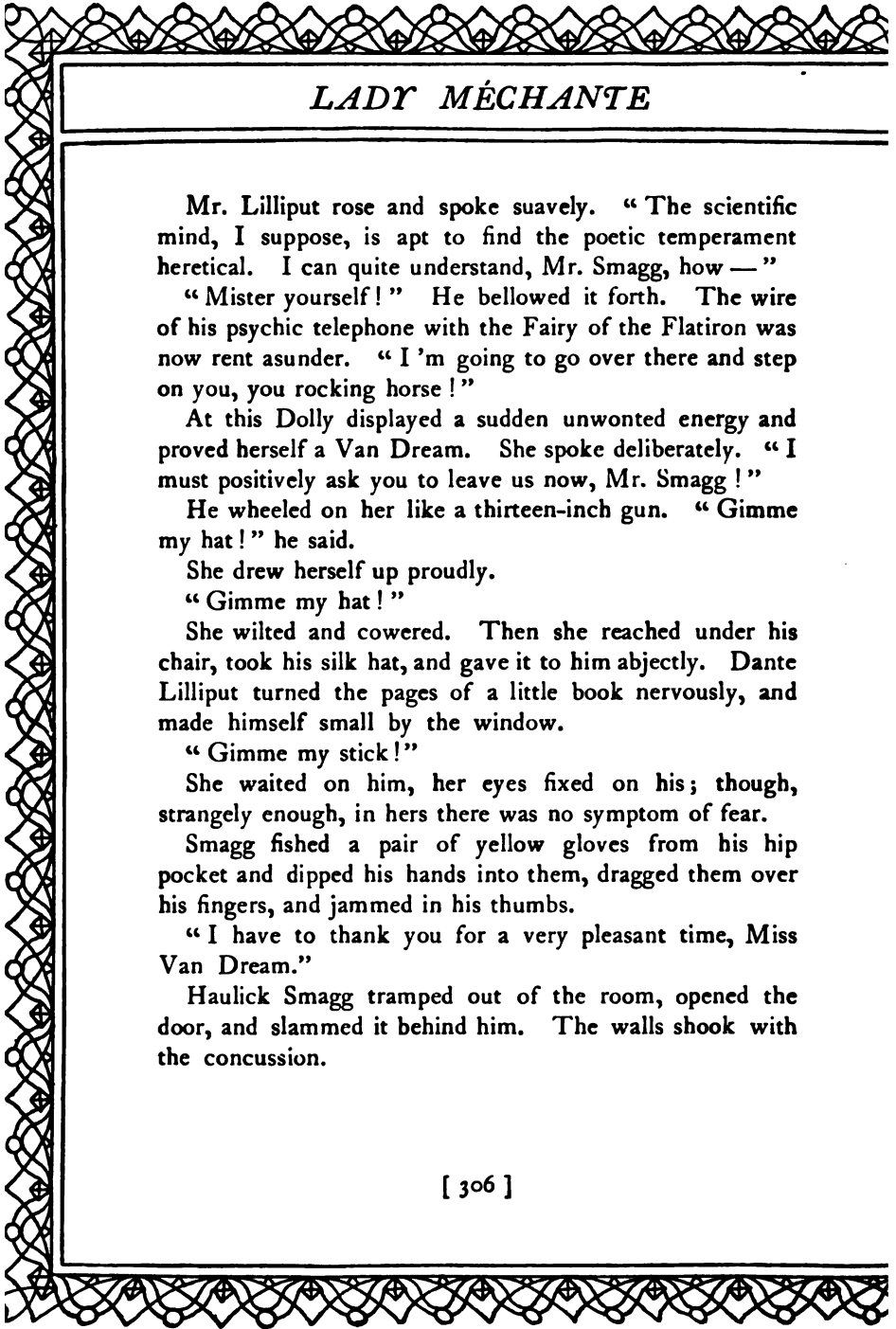
"Gawd, have you?" The very word restored him and he looked wistfully about. Miss Van Dream arose and sought the decanter. He grabbed it from her, doused out a tall glassfull, and poured it into his mouth. Then he wiped his lips with the back of his hand and gave a satisfied grunt, while the liquor stung its way down his alimentary canal and tore at his vitals. He looked proudly about the room for a while, then his gaze centered upon Dante Lilliput.

"Put that man out!" he thundered. "I want to talk to you. I like you, but I ain't got no use for a poll-parrot!"

Miss Dolly Van Dream had backed to the other side of the table, and now her voice came proud but tremulous. "Mr. Smagg," she said, "I can't stand this exhibition, really. I'm sorry, but I'll have to ask you to leave if you can't contain yourself."

A thin, small memory of Lady Méchante managed to reach his brain, and he keyed down a little. "Miss Van Dream," he said, "I have 'sociated s'long with the lower classes — really forgot how to behave. Beg y' pardon."

"Oh, it's all right; don't apologize, I beg of you!" Miss Van Dream came out from behind the table.



LADY MÉCHANTE

Mr. Lilliput rose and spoke suavely. "The scientific mind, I suppose, is apt to find the poetic temperament heretical. I can quite understand, Mr. Smagg, how —"

"Mister yourself!" He bellowed it forth. The wire of his psychic telephone with the Fairy of the Flatiron was now rent asunder. "I'm going to go over there and step on you, you rocking horse!"

At this Dolly displayed a sudden unwonted energy and proved herself a Van Dream. She spoke deliberately. "I must positively ask you to leave us now, Mr. Smagg!"

He wheeled on her like a thirteen-inch gun. "Gimme my hat!" he said.

She drew herself up proudly.

"Gimme my hat!"

She wilted and covered. Then she reached under his chair, took his silk hat, and gave it to him abjectly. Dante Lilliput turned the pages of a little book nervously, and made himself small by the window.

"Gimme my stick!"

She waited on him, her eyes fixed on his; though, strangely enough, in hers there was no symptom of fear.

Smagg fished a pair of yellow gloves from his hip pocket and dipped his hands into them, dragged them over his fingers, and jammed in his thumbs.

"I have to thank you for a very pleasant time, Miss Van Dream."

Haulick Smagg tramped out of the room, opened the door, and slammed it behind him. The walls shook with the concussion.

Chapter Four

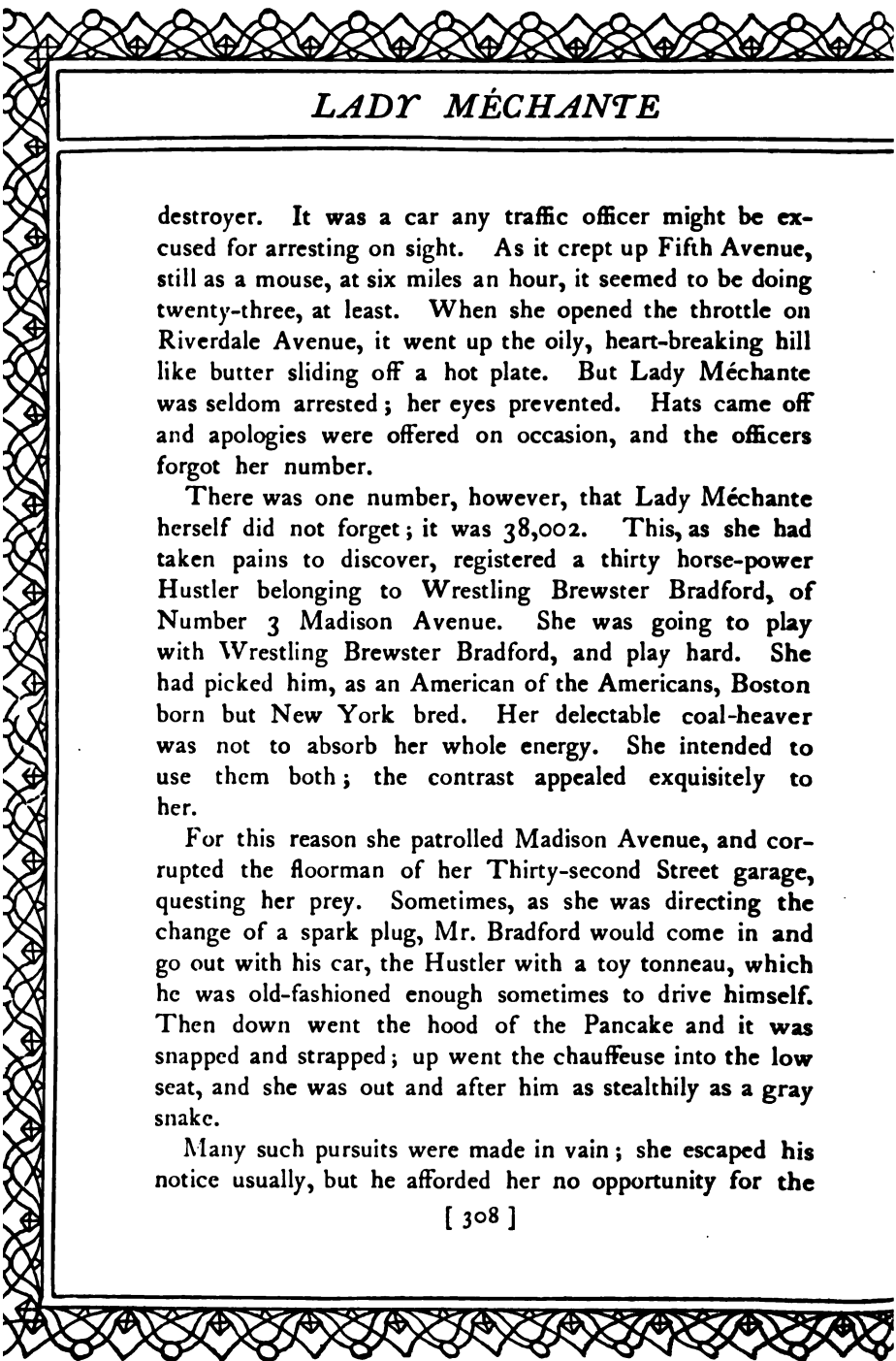
BLUE BLOOD AND RED

Oh, Slime! oh, Brickbat! do not you know that comparisons are odious?

(A Woman Killed with Kindness.)



HE has been called, heretofore, Lady Méchante, apparently in a spirit of jest, even as she herself had adopted the name of Madelaine Mischief. But, and may it not prejudice you against her, a lady she was in very sooth, and hight Méchante. She has been seen before this working overtime in social harness in Mayfair. She has been seen in her dramatic exit from the dinner-table of Madame Qui-Vive. This was interregnum, to be sure; but she had her rights, her styles, and her privileges in that high world as the wife of Lord Méchante, her first husband. The dainty coronet upon the side of her six-cylinder Pancake car, therefore, was in a way justified. She was, it is true, a good deal more proud of her extra attachable wheel, her electric horn, and several shiny brass attachments on the dashboard. Yet the insignia, with its motto, "Why not?" was placed there for a reason. Every afternoon at four found Lady Méchante in a black and white double veil and an oleander princess gown at the sportily whipped steering wheel of her racing runabout, a long, low, lead-colored craft with a wicked, raking running board that made it look like a torpedo



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destroyer. It was a car any traffic officer might be excused for arresting on sight. As it crept up Fifth Avenue, still as a mouse, at six miles an hour, it seemed to be doing twenty-three, at least. When she opened the throttle on Riverdale Avenue, it went up the oily, heart-breaking hill like butter sliding off a hot plate. But Lady Méchante was seldom arrested; her eyes prevented. Hats came off and apologies were offered on occasion, and the officers forgot her number.

There was one number, however, that Lady Méchante herself did not forget; it was 38,002. This, as she had taken pains to discover, registered a thirty horse-power Hustler belonging to Wrestling Brewster Bradford, of Number 3 Madison Avenue. She was going to play with Wrestling Brewster Bradford, and play hard. She had picked him, as an American of the Americans, Boston born but New York bred. Her delectable coal-heaver was not to absorb her whole energy. She intended to use them both; the contrast appealed exquisitely to her.

For this reason she patrolled Madison Avenue, and corrupted the floorman of her Thirty-second Street garage, questing her prey. Sometimes, as she was directing the change of a spark plug, Mr. Bradford would come in and go out with his car, the Hustler with a toy tonneau, which he was old-fashioned enough sometimes to drive himself. Then down went the hood of the Pancake and it was snapped and strapped; up went the chauffeuse into the low seat, and she was out and after him as stealthily as a gray snake.

Many such pursuits were made in vain; she escaped his notice usually, but he afforded her no opportunity for the





BLUE BLOOD AND RED

achievement of her plot. His visits to his publishers and to magazine editors and the like kept her in the heart of the traffic where the going was slow. She encountered him occasionally in the Park or on Riverside Drive, but here there was as little chance. She needed an empty road for immunity.

So she stalked her quarry for a week without avail. On the nineteenth of April she discovered him in the Hustler, which was decorated with a small American flag in honor of the shot that was heard around the world. This was at five o'clock, hard by Grant's Tomb. 38,002 swept by her, going downhill under the guidance, this time, of a leather-clad chauffeur. Lady Méchante turned immediately in a great curve and was after him. Across the Viaduct she purred along, three lengths behind. Bradford looked back once. Lady Méchante smiled. Over the Dam and out Jerome Avenue she trailed them, then leftward into Van Cortlandt Park. Here, after a little they passed the lake, and the road ran up and down hill in sinuous curves. Lady Méchante dropped a rod or so behind, and a little inverted "V" was printed on her brow. Like this: Λ.

At the top of a long, winding slope she opened her throttle wide for a quarter of a minute, then jammed it back and released the clutch. The machine jumped forward like an unhooded falcon and sailed after the Bradford car, as silent as the wind. Her foot was steady on the brake as she drew near. At ten feet distance she jammed it hard enough to check her momentum a little; then, dodging round the steering-wheel to escape the shock of it, she sent her right mud-guard into the tail lamp of the car in front. The mud-guard buckled, and her forward spring crashed into his body. Her car slewed suddenly and nearly went over.

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She had just time to shriek beautifully and fall half out of the car.

It was a great success. When Bradford, with white cheeks, reached her pink ones, her eyes were shut, one arm hung limp, one hand clutched her heart. The chauffeur came hurrying up.

Luckily they were mere men. Had Bradford's sister been there, or any other woman, she would have understood the situation perfectly. Whether the accident were genuine or not, the lady's pose was theatrical. Any woman would have said that, for the audience, nothing could have been more effective than the tangle of hair Lady Méchante had contrived to dislodge. Her display of hosiery, considering the few seconds in which she had to accomplish it, was nicely calculated between revelation and suggestion. True, she was not quite white enough, though she was holding her breath resolutely. Her eyelids were not quite inert, though they showed her lashes to good advantage. But there was no fault to be found with her entrancing, half-open mouth, showing, nestling between her white teeth, her little pointed tongue. It takes skill to stage-manage such a scheme, to be shot out of a catapult, so to speak, and fall into a graceful tableau.

Suffice it to say that the picture was not lost on Wrestling Brewster Bradford, nor even on his chauffeur. It received a moment's hushed pause in tribute of its beauty before even horror could assert itself. Horror did, however, with several "My Gods" for its expression. Then Bradford and his man, in an agony of fear and ignorance, raised the beauteous victim in their arms and laid her upon the grass beside the road. As they were too timorous to feel of her to ascertain the quality of her injuries, Lady



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Méchante paid them out in suspense, and the two wretched men, knowing they ought to do something but not knowing what to do, nor how to do it if they had, gazed down on her as at a wounded butterfly. Then Bradford dropped on his creased knees to fan her with his cap, and his mechanic was despatched for water.

Not a second too long, not a second too short, was the time Lady Méchante accorded his anguish. Then she fluttered her eyelids, quivered her lips, and looked up at him as a babe looks up for milk. Bradford's relief was written in his face.

"Are you hurt?" he demanded huskily.

She noticed with delight that his hand trembled, that already drops of sweat had gathered on his forehead. Perhaps that was why she smiled. "What happened?" she inquired faintly.

"You ran into me. I think your brake must have failed, or something. Do see if you're hurt anywhere, please. I hope we have n't broken any bones! I'd never forgive myself."

"It was my fault," she murmured, and closed her eyes again.

"Won't you see if you can't get up?" he insisted gently.

"It's terrible to see you lying there that way."

"Is it?" She opened her eyes and smiled mischievously.

"Oh — I did n't mean *that!* You're so beautiful, indeed, that I can't bear to think of your being hurt. Do see if you can rise."

She did not immediately, for she had not yet decided just where to be hurt. Certainly her ankle should be strained in order to enlist proper physical support, but she must not overdo the thing or make her injuries too specific, on ac-



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count of a possible doctor, though she was not afraid of doctors, either. So she first let loose a little "Oh!" as she drew up her knee. Then she shook a white hand stiffly and knotted her brows into a frown. Her smile came heroic now, as she played the Spartan.

"Oh, it's nothing at all, much. I expect I'm all right, but I'm afraid I can't drive my car home. By the way, is there anything left of it?"

Bradford glanced back at the road.

"I don't know," he said. "It looks a little ragged, but don't worry. I'll attend to it. You must n't think of going home alone, anyway. I'll see you're taken care of."

"It's my ankle," she said wearily, and she made a wry little mouth. "Now if you'll give me your hand I'll try to get up."

He drew her up tenderly, only to find she could not set the right foot to the ground. Coily she looked at him; timidly she consented to put her arm about his neck, to have him put his arm about her waist, her little waist, her little oleander waist. Bradford could feel her tremble; indeed, she could feel him tremble, too. She knew her business, the little scamp, this pretty liar. Could n't she manage to make him carry her? she wondered. She might have, had not the chauffeur come back, on the run, with a canvas bucket of slopping water and eyes like owls'. Catching sight of the interesting composition of the picture, he set down the bucket, backed off, and began to inspect the machines.

Bradford and his charge sat down again on the bank. "I'll be all right in a minute," she said. "Let me rest a little." That minute she proposed to spend in studying the young man she had trapped.



BLUE BLOOD AND RED

He had a head like Seneca — or was it Erasmus? Rough-hewn, yet with subtle planes — a head any portrait painter would tell you was hard to draw, and prove it. Cynicism and kindness were in his mouth, but mostly cynicism. His eyes were thinking eyes — brook hazel. It was a face most women were afraid of, but not so Lady Méchante. She saw the difference between his two lips and played for the more sensitive and sensuous lower one. Nor was she afraid of the cynicism. New York had rubbed off on him, that was all; at the bottom all was Boston enough still. Seven generations of Mayflower stock were behind him, she knew, bred in-and-in. It gave him a sharp individuality. His hands, she noticed, were square. He would not be easily fooled; still, it was lucky for her they were not conic.

“I’m not badly hurt,” she said, “except that my ankle seems to be twisted. I got off easy. It’s a good job I did n’t plough right through you. I thought I was going to. Will they take away my license?” She looked up at him with a fifteen-year-old expression. “Are you going to sue me for damages? I fancy I scratched you up a bit.”

“Oh, don’t think of that. I think your car got rather the worst of it.” He called to his chauffeur. “How did they stand it?”

“Not bad. Crumpled up a little in front — that’s all. If I had n’t slowed up when I saw her coming, it would n’t have amounted to anything at all.” He turned discreetly away.

“I’ll give you my name in case you want to have me arrested. You’d better take my number to be sure I’m not fooling you.”

LADY MÉCHANTE .

He laughed as he took the card she produced from a small red purse, then raised his eyebrows as he read the legend. She noticed it and snatched it away from him.

"I beg your pardon," she exclaimed. "I gave you the wrong one. I'm not using my title here in America." The card she now handed him bore the name "Mrs. Nelly Hellysh."

"My name is Bradford," he remarked, looking at her. "Wrestling Brewster Bradford."

"Wrestling? What an odd name!"

"I was named for an ancestor of mine. It was originally Wrestling-with-the-Lord-in-prayer Brewster. He was the son of the original Elder Brewster, the Pilgrim, you know."

"My! You *are* blue-blooded, aren't you? Fancy knowing who your ancestors were! I can't remember further back than my grandfather, and he was only an earl. I'm quite afraid of you!"

"Oh, ancestry is nothing; it's the man that counts," said Bradford, modestly.

She sat up now with animation. "But I suppose you're all sorts of things besides, aren't you? Of course you belong to the Scions of Shays' Rebellion?"

"Oh yes."

"And the Descendants of the Colonial Skirmishes?"

"Of course, and many others. All of them, in fact."

"To think I dared run into you with my car! Why, I'll be colliding with the President of the United States yet! But I did get jolly well paid out for it, did n't I?" She caressed her silken ankle with a dismal smile.

"You must let me take you home now, or to a doctor's, before it grows any worse."



BLUE BLOOD AND RED

“Well, if you don’t mind. I’m afraid, really, I can’t manage that clutch.”

He called to his chauffeur to help him support her, and they lifted her into the seat. A few explanations as to the control of her car, and he started off, followed by the Hustler.

On the way back he gave her many a side glance, and usually caught her looking at him. When Lady Méchante looked like that, something had to ache before long. The machine was too new to him, however, for him to give her much attention or much talk, and she subsided into silence as well, but her silence was quick with electricity. He could feel her when he did not see her. The vibrations of her presence kept him in a mild excitement, like a low fever coursing in his veins.

With his chauffeur he assisted her into the Flatiron Building, up the elevator and to her rooms without remark as to their extraordinary location. Here he left her, with a request to be permitted to call on the morrow to see how she had fared.

That she would fare well enough he might have found out if he could have seen her through the keyhole after he left. She walked spryly enough then, and made first for the mirror to estimate the impression she might have made. She seemed satisfied, for she blew a kiss at her reflection before she rang for her maid.

“But he does smell of ink, though,” she said. “I prefer coal dust!”

Chapter Five

A SULPHITE IN DISGUISE

Faith, you are too outrageous, but come near!

(Doctor Faustus.)

THE immediate result of the tempest in the tea party where Haulick Smagg had taken his initial plunge into society was an invitation to call on upper Fifth Avenue for Miss Van Dream's "at home." It was evident that she had found him amusing, and she, as no one else in her world, could afford to patronize him.

Lady Méchante smiled when he brought her the news. It was evident that her protégé was to be a success. At the story of his atavism she had been a little fearful whether he might not overdo the part; and, to prevent the recurrence of such psychoses, she pledged him to forswear such vulgar stimulants as might reawaken his mind to his former pursuits of pleasure. Champagne, she had already found, he could be safely trusted with. It merely sent him to a bizarre heaven where he communed with angels and wore strange robes of light and glory. Vintage wines keyed him up to his part, and liqueurs maintained his faith in the fairy-tale wherein his godmother had enchanted him. But whiskey tore the magic veil asunder; beer dashed him to the earth with a thump.

A SULPHITE IN DISGUISE

However, if Smagg were to go to the Van Dreams', Lady Méchante must go, too. She was by no means the kind of practical joker who sends things by mail and never witnesses the effect. No, she must see him in all his glory and his light; she must watch her Wooden Horse make his entry into the City of Solecisms, and watch from inside. As Frankenstein played with his monster, so she would play with hers. True, Frankenstein's monster had destroyed him, but then Frankenstein had been a German. There was nothing German about Lady Méchante; she came from the dark side of the moon; her blood ran quicksilver.

How, then, to get to Dolly Van Dream's? She communed with herself in the glass. Surely they would not put her out. She would simply go, and be done with it. She had seen hostesses before disguise their lack of memory by a fulsome welcome; she had done it herself often enough in the old days in Mayfair, where all men looked alike, all women talked alike, and none was wanted anyway. Dolly Van Dream would without doubt pretend to recognize her and be exuberant. Trust Lady Méchante for the rest. Besides, the Van Dreams had been in London for the season some years ago. She would work Smagg in, too — then turn him loose and dazzle them.

Haulick Smagg, his two hundred dollars still unspent — for his lady paid the bills — had come back and back for further tutelage. He was well through his table manners now. He could blow his nose lightly and almost with charm, saving the back of his hand for other uses. His tread was less rhinoceros-like. She had him into corsets and gave him a genteel figure. His profanity was pruned down to milder expletives. He was taught to say nothing



LADY MÉCHANTE

at all if he could help it, save sentences from her phrase book. To teach him to contemplate ladies in décolleté without obvious wonder and delight was harder. In short, some of Smagg's corners and edges had already been blunted, and he moved among his fellows with less friction. From being totally without sight in the life social, he was now only purblind, dimly seeing his way, though still holding her hand.

"This is a mere game of follow-your-leader," she said to him. "You must watch like a monkey and do the same as they do, so far as mere habits are concerned. After that, you must do everything differently; scorn everything they praise and praise everything they scorn."

He did not quite understand it yet, but the game pleased him. Paupers have played at being princes before, and Smagg, as the Sleeper Awakened, rose mightily to grasp the situation. He was avid for instruction. She tried to impress upon him that women were alike in her world as in his, but it took some time for him to believe it. When she advised him to be familiar with old ladies and serious with young girls, to be *risqué* with prudes and proper with an easier sort, he gaped at her and wondered that such things might be. But he had the goddess Minerva for his mentor and she could not err.

From her cab window she saw him enter the Fifth Avenue chateau, to be swallowed up by French Renaissance. Five minutes afterwards she was at the same portal, which was opened by the same striped waistcoat. She breathed the name of Hellysh; the butler took it up and shot it into the salon. Dolly Van Dream looked up with a puzzled expression and came a couple of steps forward with a set



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smile and an outstretched hand. Her greeting was, as Lady Méchante had expected, without trace of embarrassment. She even kissed both of Lady Méchante's pink cheeks. She held her hand long and affectionately, reproaching her for not having come before. At this moment Haulick Smagg reinforced them.

"My dear Lady Méchante, how awfully jolly to see you again! I had no idea you were in New York!"

Dolly's glance became more intelligent. The word "Lady" rang in her ears with a pleasant sound; but Lady Méchante put her forefinger to her lips and frowned deliciously. "Oh, don't call me that here, Mr. Smagg. I've dropped my title since I came to America. It's too perfectly absurd to exploit that here in a democracy. Mrs. Hellysh, please, remember. I prefer it, really."

Then she turned to Dolly. "It seems positively *years* since I met you, my dear. Where was it? At Lord Suddenleigh's? Or was it at that *very* naughty place in Surrey? I was so madly in love that I don't remember, except that I believe I was very jealous of you. You'll forgive me, won't you? Well, I *said* I'd come, and I *have* come, and it's awfully decent of you to want me, only don't breathe a word about who I am, if you don't mind. Just let me be plain Mrs. Hellysh, though you may call me Nelly, if you like. Now I hope you've got some nice men here and some good strong tea. I'll have the tea first, please." And, as she walked away, she whispered to Dolly: "Is n't Mr. Smagg a *dear*? I'm just crazy about him. You're in great luck to get him. He does n't go everywhere. I'm afraid we are going to be rivals again." And she was off to the tea-table after a quick introduction to Mrs. Van Dream. She towed Haulick Smagg in her wake.

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After she had sipped her first cup of tea she sent him forth, errant, to break a few lances, and watched him, cat-like, from her corner. Men came up and talked and stayed, and stayed and talked. Lady Méchante, rallying them, volleying them, flattering or cajoling them, still kept an eye and an ear alert for Smagg.

He stood with both hands behind his back, now, deep in conversation with a jet-clad dowager. "Opera!" His voice was deep with scorn. "It's the most ridiculous and inane exhibition known to modern civilization! It's nothing but an expensive noise made by fat German women in thick velvet clothes."

"You don't like music, then?" she said timidly.

"I don't like damn fools. I don't want my music to come out of a pasteboard dragon or cloth trees. I'm *too* fond of music to like opera." Then he lowered his voice. "Say, they got anything to drink here?"

She chuckled amiably. "How amusing you are, Mr. Smagg! You *must* come and see me. Here's my daughter. Mr. Smagg, Emily. Emily's wild about artists, Mr. Smagg. All the time she can spare from bridge and golf and dances she spends down at Dolly Van Dream's studio. Isn't it wonderful, Dolly's energy? I don't see how she ever gets up in time to paint by daylight."

"I hear you are a great art critic and a perfectly tremendous sociologist, Mr. Smagg," said Emily.

"I try to strike the modern note," was his grave reply.

"I suppose it is something awfully wicked," said Emily. "Mamma, you go along and have some tea and let Mr. Smagg tell me about it. I'm sure he's going to be too improper for you to listen to."

"Now," she continued, when they were alone, "don't be



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afraid of shocking me. I'm not afraid of the modern note. Only we girls have so little opportunity of getting the experience a man has. Do tell me something exciting! I'd love it."

Smagg considered a while. Then he said slowly, "Well, there was once a fox —"

She gave a little exclamation. "Oh, you're going to be just clever! I did n't want *that*, at all. I hoped you'd be naughty!"

He looked down at her and perceived that she was young and slim and pretty. His blood stirred in him. "You've got awfully small hands," he said. "Let's see 'em."

She held out her little hand, and he grabbed it, squeezing it till her rings cut into her fingers and the tears started to her eyes. Then he let it go, satisfied.

"Oh, Mr. Smagg," she faltered, "there's something so awfully big and strong about you! I can't tell you how I admire you. I think you understand me." And she cast down her eyes in confusion.

Just then he caught Lady Méchante's amused glance. "Oh, women understand each other, but they never understand themselves," he stammered. "Did I hurt you?"

"Of course you did. You're the only man I ever met who ever dared to. It was wonderful! Why, the men in my set would no more dare to strike a woman than they would ride a bicycle up Fifth Avenue! I really think you would really dare to be rude. Please do; I'd adore it! You are so different, and everything. I don't see how you can do it and still not wear funny collars, or anything."

"You never can tell what you can do till you stop trying," he said, and wondered to see her giggle. He said it with just the proper amount of distracted attention, because

LADY MÉCHANTE

his eyes had become fascinated by a glittering diamond pin at Emily's throat. But, perceiving that he had pleased, he ventured to reach forth his hand and say :

"Gimme that thing, will you? I want it."

"You adorable man!" Emily unfastened the pin and handed it to him. After he had looked at it for a minute, he dropped it into the tail pocket of his coat, turned suddenly away, and left her staring.

A lady seated in a gold chair interfering with his progress through the room, he put his foot on the rung of the chair and shoved it, with its occupant, out of his way. He elbowed between two black coats, trod across several lacy trains, and took Lady Méchante by the arm. She pinched him well for it.

"Do I do it all right?" he asked. "It seems to go slick enough."

"Oh, you'll never get on this way," she said. "You are too smooth, altogether. You've got to bully them if you want to make a success. It looks as if you were just trying to be agreeable. Remember what I told you. You have to go either saddled and bridled or booted and spurred. Drive them, Incubus, drive them! Make them afraid of you! Shoot a little fire or I'll perish of ennui. Do you think I took the trouble to come here to see you tamed? Make them jump through the hoop; crack your whip! Bark, ringmaster."

She turned to her neighbor. "Why, of course. It's absurd to say that society in America is not so refined and well bred and well organized as it is abroad. I don't see any difference. You say the same things as we do, whatever you think. You worship the inconspicuous and the unoriginal. Why, look at this delightful Mr. Smagg. Of



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course he's an intellectual type, a sociologist, a critic, a connoisseur, and all that sort of thing. He has all the modern point of view as a thorough man of the world, but he is a gentleman through and through, such as you might find in the highest circles of English Society. In point of fact, I did find him there, at the Bishop of Shoreditch's, and he was hand in glove with the Duke of Billingsgate and all that set. He has even played bridge with W. B. See how well he fits in here! Does n't it prove my point?"

Since her arrival Lady Méchante's name had buzzed from corner to corner about the room. There was already a press of men encompassing her, and ladies waited to be introduced. It was not so surprising, for Dolly Van Dream led her circle and had produced queen bees before able to set the hive swarming. So Lady Méchante's *apologia* was passed about as well. Haulick Smagg on Dolly Van Dream's acceptance was accepted, and on Lady Méchante's praise was praised. With the lash she gave him he went back into the ring, stimulated to find his work so easy.

He could not see what they were all doing there, anyway, merely standing about and talking, without drink or diversion. It was all nonsense, any way you looked at it. How could one be a bigger fool than another? What the hell was there to be afraid of? He had seen crowds on election night, crowds at Coney Island, crowds going or coming. But this was a different sort. It seemed to have no object; he wondered how anyone would know when to go home. The women were pretty enough, but they hung back so, curse them! They seemed half asleep. They began to inspire him with a dull resentment. He did not know yet that he was beginning to be bored. Afraid of them? He had money now and was afraid of

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nothing. His first hundred dollars had given him the will to kick an elevator starter down the hall. His second had made him give his orders to Dolly Van Dream herself. Lady Méchante? She was another breed altogether, a thoroughbred, a prize winner, far out of his reach. There was a lady if you like! As distant as a rainbow, yet as beautifully near.

Still, though he was not cowed, he was dazed. Lady Méchante's advice had greased his way so far; he would try it again. What did it all matter? He had nothing to lose. If worst came to worst, he still had his two hundred dollars, and he could make it all up in such a drunk as would get in the papers. Why, they were all afraid of *him*, for all he knew. He decided to see if they were n't.

He had started across the room, he had reached Dolly Van Dream and opened his mouth to speak to her, when of a sudden all the electric lights went out. The *salon* was as black as midnight in a tunnel. There was a startled murmur of exclamations all over the room, and a nervous laugh ran around. Men and women jostled each other and giggled; voices rose calling for lights; a match was struck here and there, showing up half-scared, half-amused faces.

The effect on Haulick Smagg was instantaneous; he became a cave man; his costume was forgotten; forgotten was the newness of the scene, the unwonted glitter, the display of ladies' shoulders, the luxurious environment, the stones and silks, the calm, mysterious order of the place. The darkness made it a cavern. In a moment he was himself again, a primitive man. His glance had fastened on Dolly Van Dream as the light went out. He put out his hand with surety; he seized her, closed his arm



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about her neck, and drew her face to his. His grasp was like an orang-outang's, so fierce and rapid that his embrace strangled her sudden cry of fear. Then a light came traveling in through the door, a flame on a taper. He released her like an animal afraid of fire, and when the gas was turned on he wondered at his temerity.

But more he wondered at the effect on Dolly Van Dream.

“How dare you? Really, you *must n't* do such things here. Why, what if anyone saw you?” But there was no reproach in her eyes; only embarrassment, and perhaps even admiration.

So he had made his love in the underworld, and so he had been received. It gave him a strange sense of exultation. It was the victory and not the kiss that went to his head. Lady Méchante's words of advice came to him. In order to get acquainted with a woman, a secret shared with her was the first requisite. Was this a secret he had with Dolly Van Dream? Perhaps, with their strange manners, a kiss was a thing to be denied or hidden. Perhaps ladies did not kiss men. He had not seen any kissing done since his entry into society. Lady Méchante had told him, too, that these women were no different from those he had known. Well, he would find out.

By the time the excitement had lulled and the lights had come on again, there was a movement toward the supper room. Lady Méchante shook off her suitors and captured her charge. She had spent her time well in the corner with her heiresses and tame young men. By this time she had found out about several of the guests and had marked them for the massacre. As they threaded the throng she filled Smagg's ears with information; as they sat in the




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supper-room she coached him between lively remarks to right and left as to the personalities present.

There was old Huggins, for instance, the president of the Peanut Trust, whose nefarious operations had forced up prices till there was scarce sustenance in a quart. The poor cursed him nightly on the Elevated and in the public parks, yet he was received in this company of the elect as without smirch. The Peanut Trust was already indicted, but it was the miserable hucksters and sidewalk vendors who were suffering, while Huggins raced in two-thousand-ton yachts.

Over against them was a member of the Committee of Fifty, already sold out to the Prohibition Party, as every one present knew. In the corner was Theodore Glush, a manufacturer of flypaper so notoriously adulterated and bedrugged that he had twice been arrested by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. He had made his millions in flies, and was said to breed them at a marshy stock farm in New Jersey to boom the sale of his product.

There was an Episcopal bishop who was known to have put musical comedies on the stage in order to cure audiences of going to the theater. Why, at their very side, was young McSmick, who had shot a tailor for attempting to collect his bill, and who had been acquitted on a defense of the Unwritten Law. Not to speak of John Rockwell, Jr., a millionaire Sunday-school superintendent who had been found guilty of sending obscene matter through the mails. True, the evidence of the crime was but a post card bearing a verse from the Bible; but, as the law requires a jury to convict if the probable effect upon a purely hypothetical person would be evil, the authorship of the text did not prevent the Sunday-school teacher's sentence. These



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and many other monsters she showed him ; the starched shirts covered a multitude of sinners. But since they had sinned so far successfully, they were still received.

“Gawd, what a rotten lot !” said Smagg. “Why, down our way when they find a lump of stone in the coal, they heave it at the driver. I seen a barkeeper once who put soap in the beer to make it lather ; he did n’t live long. Let’s go over and punch some of their faces. Me for Glush ! Gawd ! We got flies at home so thick you can’t tell custard pie from huckleberry.”

“Oh, the women are just as good !” said Lady Méchante. “There’s one over there now, the one with the feather duster in her hair and the gold harness round her neck. She sold her daughter for three millions to an ex-bootblack called Prince Gondola. There’s another one who has married thirteen men in fourteen years. She has got a Senator now ; she may work up to a coal-heaver in time.”

“Not *me* !” said Smagg. “When I marry a woman I want a new one. But what do they all do ?”

“Oh, things like this, and bridge and golf and dances.”

“Don’t they ever have any fun ?”

“Oh, they go to the theater and the Opera.”

Smagg grunted. “I’ve heard what Opera’s like. Not for mine ! They all have automobiles, though, same as you do.”

“There’s not a man in the room can run one,” said Lady Méchante, “and airships are n’t for sale yet. Oh, they have a very good time playing about.”

“I don’t see where it comes in, if it’s like this. Damned if I know why they come here and stand around on their hind legs.”

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"Hush! They have to!" Lady Méchante shot a keen glance at him.

"Have to? Ain't they got money? Why don't they spend it?"

"It's spending them."

Smagg looked puzzled. "I ain't on to this game," he said. "There must be something in it or they would n't do it."

"Ah!" said Lady Méchante. "You chew on that for a while."

He had finished his salad and his lobster, and had thrust a plate of ice cream away from him so violently that it had dropped from the waiter's hands. As usual, but now with a detached, *distract* manner, he had stamped upon the broken plate. The Extra Dry had mounted to his brain and set it in motion. It lifted him to equality, even to superiority, and it gave to Lady Méchante's words wings.

As his lady was now again encompassed by her admirers, he set forth for new flights, inspired by her parting precept to specialize on the old ladies. The champagne gave him charm; it freed him somewhat from the constraint of the place, and his native character came out more and more. It has been remarked that Haulick Smagg was not ill-favored; it would be too much to claim for him gracefulness, but he did have strength, almost power, and his courage waxed stronger and stronger with his scorn.

His eyes singled out Mrs. Van Dream, and he forced his way to her through the press. She made a seat for him beside her. She was solidly built, plump and round and smooth, with a sensationally low cut corsage sewn with sequins. From her shoulders to her lowest chin there was scarce room for a neck, but what there was was white and

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fat. Her lips were suspiciously red, her eyebrows suspiciously black, and even her ears were made up. A tiara, exploding with diamonds, adorned her too-black hair.

"Well, Mr. Smagg, you're not often so frivolous as this, are you? I suppose sociology occupies most of your time, does n't it? It's good of you to let us have you a little while."

He clasped his knees with his great white-gloved hands and thrust out his great feet. "Oh, I got to take the bad with the good in my business."

She raised her *lorgnon* to look at him, but it did not frighten him. "My daughter tells me you're so terribly learned. Positively, I'm afraid of you, Professor."

"Gawd! I can remember when I used to be afraid of you, too — when I was shoveling coal into your cellar. I've seen you, many's a time, all baled up in furs with a couple of them little snipes with tall hats and tight pants waiting for you on the sidewalk. Huh! I did n't think I'd ever see the inside of *this* house."

"Well, I hope you'll see it often again. I think you're *most* amusing. It's good to see a new face occasionally. I know the history of everyone here by heart."

"It would n't bear bein' printed, from what *I* hear."

"My dear man, of course not, but what's the good of having money if we can't keep things out of the papers? In time I hope we can own all the papers in our set, and then we can do quite as we please, as they do in England now."

"Have you got much money?" Mr. Smagg inquired.

She chuckled. "I wish I had enough to pay you to come oftener. You're delightful." She reached over and tapped him on the arm.

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He grabbed her fat hand and shook it cordially. "Say, you're all right, old girl, if you did n't put so much flour on your face. You don't need it, and it don't fool anybody."

She gasped delightedly. "Oh, Mr. Smagg, you're simply terrible!"

He was staring at her point blank. "I knew a girl what had eyes like yours," he remarked, "and she was a devil, too."

Old lady Van Dream bridled and was coy. "Well," she sighed, "there *was* a time—"

"I'll bet you're good for it yet!" He slapped her on the knee.

"Flatterer!"

"I like a woman with a temper, myself. Now you'd give a man a run for his money, I'll bet!" He leaned nearer and smiled full in her face. "Say, men are crazy about you, ain't they?"

"Oh, I won't say *that* — but of course if you had seen me when I was younger —"

"Younger! Why, you got a good forty years yet to eat men up in. Wash off some of that paint and you'll be young enough! What's them rings worth, about?" He took up her hand casually and pulled off a marquise.

"Oh, some thousands perhaps; why?" She had stopped looking about to see if anyone were listening.

"I suppose a different man give you each one of them, did n't they? You must be a whirlwind, from what I hear. They say the girls in your crowd ain't in it with you. I don't wonder. I don't mind weight, myself; I like something I can feel when I pick up—good and husky like you—a good eater and all that."

Mrs. Van Dream invited him to dinner on the spot.



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Mr. Smagg said airily that he did n't know whether he could come or not, but he'd see about it.

He left her to wander, hands in pockets, to other be-diamonded matrons, and wherever he saw a gray hair or a too blonde one he continued his impertinences. He spared neither the widow nor the divorcée. His eyes were audacious; his lips were free with compliment and with criticism. Instinctively he adopted the only safe way to win a woman's interest — by making the conversation personal from the first.

With the men he fairly swaggered.

The bishop he accused of being a Jesuit in justifying his means to his end. He called old Huggins to his face one of the Predatory Rich, and waxed eloquent over the wrongs done holiday makers.

“Corporations have no souls,” he stormed, “except the soles of their boots to stomp on the poor with. You'll be making customers return their peanut shells next, for you to grind up to make hardwood floors of. Then you'll want the skins of 'em for red firecrackers, to compete with Chinese pauper labor. Peanuts'll be a cent apiece before you get through with us, and only the rich can afford to eat 'em. They're getting littler every Saturday. They was eighty-one to the pint last week, and it ain't one in ten is a double one, nowadays. You'll bring on a riot if you don't look out, you plutocrats. The common people won't stand it much longer. If you take away the poor man's peanut, you'll take away the poor man's pie, and then there's going to be trouble.”

Then he turned on Glush. “I've known mean men in my day. I've known automobile tire manufacturers who had tack works on the side, and sprinkled the streets with

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them out of special carts. I've know phonograph men who worked in advertising featuring in the middle of Caruso's songs; but a man who'll drop the food of a dying fly ought to be prosecuted under the Pure Food Law."

And lastly, to McSmick: "If there's many more like you gets off, there'll be a law passed to make every tailor sew a cloth receipt into the seat of every pair of pants he makes before he sends them out. How'll we look *then* walking up Broadway?" he demanded savagely.

So he bullied the men and captivated the women, while Lady Méchante followed him about with her eyes and ears and Greek-chorused his epic progress toward popularity. The net result was six invitations to dinner, five lunches down-town, unnumbered requests to call, a few bids for week-end parties, and an ingenious declaration, in the corner of the music room, from little Emily.

"I don't know *why* I should n't tell you that I love you, Mr. Smagg. The girls in my set believe in frankness. We're *terribly* modern. So, if it's true, why should n't I say so? It *is* true." She looked up at him with melting eyes. "I suppose perhaps I ought to wait until I'm sure you love *me*, but perhaps you never *will* love me, or if you do you'll forget to say so. Men are so *terribly* thoughtless about such things. But surely there is nothing to be ashamed of, is there, in honest affection? I believe things would be much easier if men and woman were perfectly simple with each other and said what they really thought. I would only be acting a lie if I kept this from you.

"I want to be perfectly straight forward. I respect you too much, Mr. Smagg, not to give you my whole confidence. I want to be honorable, as men are honorable. Women have been accused of deceit so long that I think every really



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honest and noble-hearted girl ought to take a stand in the matter. She ought to be on the right side and make no pretenses about her emotions. You move me ; you trouble me ; I can't take my eyes off you ! You're handsome and strong and fine. I think you are kind too. Somehow, I can't bear not to have you know it. It seems like doing you a wrong to conceal it. I can't help feeling as I do, can I ? It's all a question of electricity, magnetism, chemistry. I'm not responsible, and I don't want to be held responsible. All I do want is to be able to tell you outright that I'm wildly in love with you, I'm crazy about you. I don't really think I can live without you — but that's a different thing, for I don't want to give you any trouble at all. I don't expect anything ; I don't *want* anything — only to be permitted to adore you. I know I can trust you. I know you are worthy of my honesty. It's simply fate, that's all ; fate has thrown us together and I must cling to you. You need n't mind it at all, Haulick — I don't want to marry you ! That would be *too* much, but I *must* be true to myself. I may not be true to you, Haulick, but I shall always be true to myself. There ! Do you *hate* me ? Do you think I'm a bold, immodest thing, just because I've shown you my naked soul ? ”

He had been chewing steadily at a toothpick the while, his eyes watching idly the couples barn-dancing in the ball-room. Now he spat it out and turned to the little temperamental, passion-swept, hungry-eyed figure beside him. “ Oh, *that's* all right,” he said. “ I guess I'll go out and have a smoke.”

He left her and walked out of the room without exactly understanding what had happened.

Chapter Six

THE BEST BEST SELLER

*I'll fit him aptly: either I'll awake
His wits (if he have any) or force him
To appear (as yet I cannot think him)
Without any.*

(Wit at Several Weapons.)



RESTLING BREWSTER BRADFORD had called at the Flatiron Building once, twice, thrice; the result being that, at the third call, he had produced and read the manuscript of a singularly keen and subtle piece of symbolistic fiction, done with masterly style. Lady Méchante positively thrilled under it.

"Is n't that rotten?" he asked. "It is positively the nearest I can come to it." He looked at her hopelessly.

"Why, it's superb!" she exclaimed. "You've actually got it! It's life!"

"It's death for me," he said. "That's the sort of stuff I am doomed to write."

"I'd be glad to be able to do it."

"It's as easy as talking. I can do it by the week at a stretch. What good does it do? I can't possibly sell it to anything except the *North American Monthly* or the *Atlantic Review*. I'll get fourteen dollars for it and nobody will ever see it except educated people. Nobody but men and a few school-teachers. Why can't I write anything that's fit for women, and for *Mimsey's*?" His look was pathetic.



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“Do you like *Mimsey's*?” she asked, raising her eyebrows.

“Like it? Why, I adore it, and that's no mere figure of speech. Why, people *read* that magazine; they don't leave it on the lower shelf of the library table, or send it to the lighthouse men. They gloat; they devour. *Women* read it, and it's women who make fame and fortune for writers. God! If I could ever take up that magazine, with its picture of a slim, anemic female on the cover, with the blub underneath: ‘*I consider this number of my magazine about the hottest piece of pie that was ever shoved over the counter. It has snap and go and pepper and brains in it. Read it, and see if I haven't got Kipling locked into the coal cellar ringing up Information*’—if I could find a story of mine underneath *that* cover I'd know I'd made good!” He strode up and down the room in his excitement.

“Still, there are n't many who can turn out the sort of fiction that you are capable of. Why, it's equal to George Meredith, it seems to me. You have the true literary instinct.”

“That's just the trouble. I don't want the true literary instinct. I want to write one of the Six Best Sellers. I want to appear in that immortal list of names for at least one month, in at least one town.”

“I suppose you *would* get more royalties,” said Lady Méchante, leading him on.

“Royalties be hanged! I'd get more fame, hot off the saucepan, made while you wait. I want to be able to go into the public library at East Bend, Iowa, and take down my novel off the shelf and find it read to a frazzle—worn and torn and sticky with chewing-gum, half the leaves gone, the covers loose—and scrawled across the title page,

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‘This is a good book!’ *That’s* the test of literary success.”

“But you must get good reviews,” said Lady Méchante. “That ought to console you some.”

“Reviewers! They’re all prostituted to the advertising department in the papers. There’s no such thing left as literary criticism. Why, I know a girl on the *Boston Ledger* who is a friend of the literary editor. She takes home six volumes a week. Two she reads herself; she gives one to her grandmother, one to her mother, one to her little sister, and one to the Irish cook. They tell her what they think about them, and she writes it down and turns it in. No, there’s only one reviewer worth considering.” He shook his finger at her. “And that’s the little girl in *Terre Haute* who goes down to the book store and rummages the counter till she finds a book with a pretty girl on the cover and illustrations by Misty, plenty of conversation, and a happy ending — the little girl that takes it home with a box of caramels, pins a blanket over the transom of her door, and sits up and reads till three o’clock and then *talks* about it next day. *That’s* who I want to write for. There’s a string of ’em from here to San Francisco, all reading the same book at the same time. I’d like to marry one of them and find out what they’re like. Perhaps I could get an idea how to sell more than twenty-five hundred copies then.”

“Why, you have set your name in American literature!” Lady Méchante protested.

“I’d rather set my name in the *Woman’s Own Comrade*. I never saw a girl in a street car reading one of *my* books. Why, even when I do sell one, the publisher is frightened to death of my copy. In the last one they even made me

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expurgate three dots . . . that they said were too suggestive. Could my heroine have a 'laughing devil in her eye'? Not much. They changed it to 'laughing light.' They made her go home at ten o'clock instead of eleven, and forbade her to wear silk stockings. The natural inference was, of course, that she went round bare-legged. Publishers did n't care, so long as it was n't mentioned. I don't care, either! If I could invent a woman who had nothing but a head and hands, I'd do it, too. The trouble is, I suppose, I know too much about society to write about it successfully, and I've seen too many real women with characters and brains to be able to draw the paper dolls the little girls want nowadays. But I'll do it, by heaven, if I have to get my little niece to help me! I'll sell in the Middle West yet. But I'll have to get a bottle of pale blue ink to write with."

So, in Lady Méchante's little salon, Wrestling Brewster Bradford delivered his jeremiad. She assured him that such magnificent determination must win, and repeated effort would undoubtedly place him in the ranks of the select company which changes year by year.

"Well," she said, "meanwhile I can only congratulate any grandchildren you may have for your posthumous fame. You'll have that, anyway!"

"I want it myself, now; I don't care a snap for my posterity."

"Tut, tut! what if William and Wrestling had said that! You would n't be such an aristocrat to-day! I can't help being terribly afraid of you," she declared. "Why, I suppose you have coats-of-arms on your walls and family trees reaching clear to the ceiling, have n't you? I have never before met one of the Mayflower Descend-

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ants. It seems very wonderful to the poor little granddaughter of a wretched earl. I hope you won't come here with all your blue ribbons and things on. I'm terribly afraid of a badge! You'll think I'm a miserable little parvenu. Don't tell me you're a Son of the Draft Riots! I could n't stand *that!*"

"Oh, you must n't mind it. I won't patronize you, I'm sure. For my part, I think a lord is fully the equal of a member of the Boston Tea Party. They are nothing but names, anyway, and we're not responsible for our ancestors."

"But they are, in a way, for us."

"Oh, yes; it's best to do them credit, if you can. But if you don't happen to have any that were particularly important it should n't matter much."

"Still, it gives a certain something — a poise, a dignity, that I could never attain, I'm sure. My first husband, Lord Méchante, used to say that he felt like a perfect bounder every time he met a New Englander. It's tremendously decent of you to come and see me, and I'll have to try and not disgrace you if I can manage it. Do you think I ought to wear my coronet? Or would it be too pitiful to try and keep up with you? Why, your sister may be the president of a Chapter, for all I know, and have her picture in the paper every time there's a fight in the Board of Governors! I'm afraid I'm perfectly hopeless."

He twirled his moustache deprecatingly. "Nonsense, my dear Mrs. Hellysh; you're quite fit for any circle of American society. I can't think you would seem out of place in even our oldest families. I'm sure I find you most *au fait*. It does me good to see another sort of person for a change."



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“Thank you,” said Lady Méchante. “It’s awfully good of you to say it. And I’ve been thinking, don’t you know, that still more of it might do you good. What I mean to say is that you can’t get the popular point of view you need by association with your blue-blooded set.”

“Well, I’m associating with *you* now, am I not? I do find the change beneficial, I confess.”

“Oh, I know, but you see the trouble is that, while of course I’m your social inferior, I happen to be, mentally, quite your equal. It’s precisely that mental atmosphere which you should change. As you yourself said, you can’t write about society if you’re in society yourself. One does n’t get local color that way at all. Society people don’t read society novels; they don’t need to. Society novels are written for the benefit and amusement of the folk beyond the pale. It is *their* conception of society you want to get before you become one of the immortal Six. One does n’t expect burglar stories to be written by burglars, does one? Nor detective stories by detectives. Why should a society man write a society story, then? It is perfectly absurd.”

“But I never wrote a society story,” said Bradford.

“Which is precisely why you are not a Best Seller.”

“Well, I don’t see any way out of it, then.”

The lady laughed, and she used on him that peculiar searching glance which had so often been effective. “The way out of it is perfectly plain. You must change your *milieu* — your view-point, your habits, your companions.” Her eyes sparkled.

“How can I do that, I wonder?” He mused on the problem.

“I’ll tell you. You must go down into the under-world,

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where people feel and do not think. You must study life at close range, forget your proud ancestry, your intellectual processes, your critical sense. Find out what the other half reads, and why."

"Not a bad idea," said Bradford. "Of course I do know how to write, and, if I could manage to forget it, I might do something great."

"Oh, it is n't so much learning *how* not to write, as *what* not to write."

"Well, I believe I'll try it. I might get a position as secretary, say, to some millionaire."

Lady Méchante snickered as she looked at him. "What you *ought* to do," she said, "is — I know it is, but it would be too perfect, too delicious — to be a coal-heaver." She raised her eyes to the ceiling. "What poetic justice! What a gorgeous piece of symmetry! What composition! What compensation!"

"A coal-heaver! Do you really think it is necessary to be quite as dirty as that, Mrs. Hellysh?" He hung upon her words anxiously.

"Well, perhaps not," she sighed, "though it would do me infinite good if you could only bring yourself to it. I think I'll have to let you off with footman. I happen to know a very respectable, deserving family, entirely out of your world and, of course, miles below you socially. They are millionaires, named Van Dream. I think I might get you in there, and I'm sure that you'd find among the servants exactly that secret of life and literature which you will find essential if you are really determined to succeed in fiction."

"By Jove! I believe you have got the solution of it!" And he went over to her, patrician though he was — so





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shocked out of his traditional calm — and took both Lady Méchante's hands in his, shaking them in gratitude.

She looked up at him through half-closed lids and shot him a dangerous little message, secret as a Masonic password. He did not receive it, though the little adventuress got her answer. The complacency of the Bradfords protected him. There was too much ink in his blood. He was too intent upon the scheme she had proposed. The more he thought of it, the more sure he was that the easiest path to literary eminence led up Mrs. Van Dream's back stairs.

He gave Lady Méchante, in fact, no rest until she had secured the position for him. With the invention of his previous history and the forging of several "characters" from English housekeepers, it was hardly a week before Wrestling Brewster Bradford, in a striped waistcoat and brass buttons, opened the front door to callers at the Fifth Avenue chateau.

Chapter Seven

THE BEAST OF NEW YORK

*You are next a prophet, signior,
And, but the sexes differ, speak my thoughts.*

(The Brothers.)



MAGG progressed by leaps and bounds. He ran rampant through society, which followed him, gasping at the exhibition. He was booted and spurred now, whipping them right and left with flattery and abuse, débutante, dancing man and matron. Surely, as Methuselah has it, "For him who careth not, the garlands are hung in every house." Smagg cared not one whit; he was playing the game now, and was more interested in the moves than the winning. Little Emily was not the only dabchick who would traffic with him in the peculiarly modern manner of flirtship then regnant. Old lady Van Dream was but one of his conquests among the dowagers. With them, however, he was no mere handy man, or tame cat, to do their bidding. Smagg had no champagne to sell and no axes to grind; his own bright hatchet Lady Méchante kept well sharpened for him. With the men he was as potent; he dominated and blustered, bluff for their bluff, brag for their boast. Indeed, his patron, seeing how well his words carried, how magnificent was his face with them, had serious thoughts of establishing him downtown in a splendid mahogany office, with



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counters, brass rails, glass doors, and blonde typists galore. Why, in this city, as she soon discovered, a letterhead sufficed. All he would have to do would be to refuse money, select his clients from the line, and bag the sport. If he could only be induced to fear a waiter enough to spend as much as his fellows in the fashionable restaurants, he would inspire confidence. Smagg, however, had a way of ordering only what he wished to eat, and a rooted dislike of paying more than four times its worth. With such low tendencies Lady Méchante was afraid to risk him among the men of the city. To be as eccentric as that one must needs have millions, which she had not.

She followed him, then, like a shadow in his social career. He opened doors for her, for he was branded by the matrons as an Interesting Young Man. She kept in the middle distance, occasionally venturing near enough to slip him an aphorism or epigram or a paradox, or to push him on when he grew faint-hearted. By this time, however, Smagg had passed the first corner and was now well into the straight. His eyes began to open. To be sulphitic with bromides, and with sulphites bromidic, he found, was the way to success. He needed no longer the advice: "Get into a corner and say anything you can think of — only talk!" He began to have secrets of sorts with others than Dolly Van Dream. He had an ingenious way of discovering what girls most liked and most feared to talk about, and he was wonderful with the mothers of babes. He was taught bridge and learned adroitly when to lose or win. He talked of Aitken and Jekyll Island to one set, or Virginia Hot Springs and Lenox to another, while, with those on the perimeter of his circle, he had discrimination enough to mention Palm Beach or Lakewood. He knew now how many buttons



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should be on the coat of a butler, and could tell a parlor maid from an upstairs servant, and just who cleaned the silver. He grew to know every horse on upper Fifth Avenue and could tell when a landau's lines followed the latest mode.

Meanwhile he was leaving cards, eating dinners — marking with the end of his fork on the tablecloth, to illustrate his remarks — loafing in clubs with his hat on and dallying on the links with the best of them. He deplored the inquisitiveness and impertinence of the newspapers with the rest of his set, and, with the rest of his set, read the society column every morning, looking for the latest scandal and to see if his name were mentioned. He sneered at politics and the corruption of the municipal administration, but thought it foolish to attend the primaries. At this phase of his career he was, in his circle, an average man and slipped along smoothly and easily in the groove. He had thoughts on sociology, too, and here his reputation gave him authority. These, however, were for club and tea table use, when the social secretaries were out of earshot.

“You can't tell me. I know the whole thing, and I've seen how education affects the working people. It's only making the masses discontented. It's merely showing them things that are and should be out of their reach. What's the good of teaching a hod carrier astronomy? He'll never be able to own an observatory — he'll only fall off his ladder with his bricks while he's gawking up into the sky. So long as they don't know how to read, they're happy. No, I don't mind a coal-heaver trying to pass for a gentleman, if he can do it.” Here Smagg would lean back and roll his Carolina Perfecto between his teeth.

“No, a coal-heaver could n't do it and he would n't





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be happy if he did. He could n't do it because his psychology is entirely different; he has n't evolved sufficiently; he could n't make the fine distinctions we all make. Why, he could n't tell a foreign champagne from a domestic brand. He'd show the mark of the beast and prefer beer to either." Here Smagg's eyes grew sad.

"He would n't be happy just because he *did* prefer beer. He would n't be happy because he could n't have his way with women; he could n't order 'em about and kiss 'em the way he used to. He would n't be happy on account of his clothes and his tobacco. You can teach a man quaternions and Spenser's poetry, but you can't teach him to forget the taste of a five-cent plug of Navy chewing tobacco. It's nature's law. The coherence of the social fabric must be maintained or our civilization will all go to pot." And Haulick Smagg would sigh and tap the bell and send the boy for his mail and a couple of gin rickeys.

He was strong, too, for the family as the indivisible unit of our civilization, strong against divorce in its attempt to divide the indivisible, strong for the "social fabric," to which divorce was indubitably hostile. This, in the secondary stage of Smagg's evolution. The time was to come when, breaking free from his house of bondage, he was to proclaim that divorce should be as easy as marriage — that one should be able to be wedded by telephone or postcard and be divorced by the nearest policeman. But this is premature.

Through all this conventional career Dolly Van Dream followed him, panting and breathless. She was fascinated by him, alternately delighted and disgusted. By just that extra ounce of brains which was her unique birthright in her world she perceived dimly that something was wrong.



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She noted tiny inconsistencies in his character. Traces of Smagg's smaggery appeared at times, like a lozenge of naked skin shown in the back of a lady's neck when a button has gone astray. That touch of humanity in him distinguished him from the staid sobriety of other men in her set. It was as if she saw the first whiffs of smoke from a slumbering volcano. Her social instinct disapproved of all evidences of originality, but her mind rejoiced. It made him impossible, but it made him charming. When he was proper, he overdid propriety; his polish was suspiciously smooth, so smooth that the scratches of smaggery showed too plainly on his surface.

There was another source of disturbance similar to this in the aspect of her new footman. He, too, was too perfect in his manner when he was correct, not to make his occasional lapses from a beautiful servility noticeable. He had come, extravagantly recommended, from Lady Méchante. He had been Lord Suddenleigh's man, and valet to the Duke of Billingsgate. If so, why, when she caught him off guard, should this very well-trained servant eye her so hungrily? He waited on her with a little too much alacrity. He failed to achieve that fine scorn, that bored look, that marks the acme of service. She could not put her finger on the trouble yet with either of them, but both worried her.

To Lady Méchante, however, of course the secret was clear, it having been confided to her by the footman in a hurried interview in the hall.

"This is just exactly what I wanted," said Bradford. "Do you know, these people below stairs have precisely the point of view on society that is necessary for successful fiction. They know all the manners and customs of millionaires,



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and nothing of their real thoughts and emotions. All one has to do is to take a lot of lay figures and put them into the attitudes any well-trained servant can recognize—and there you have a Best Seller ready made to your hand. This butler, Tillotson, I believe, has the thing better than even my little girl in Terre Haute, and I'm studying his taste night and day. I'm finding out what he thinks of these people, and what are his theories as to their actions. I'm not so sure that Tillotson has n't written a lot of Best Sellers himself. Sometimes I suspect him of being really Robert Hallroom himself. There are a lot of Hallroom's books whose scenes might have been laid in this very house. His whole interpretation of society convinces me."

"I believe you are right," said Lady Méchante. "It must be infinitely amusing to be a servant. I quite envy you!"

"The trouble is I can't help forgetting occasionally that I am a servant. Miss Van Dream does disturb me some, I confess. I had n't expected to find a girl like that in a nest of mere multimillionaires. Why, you'd never imagine but what she had Family! Actually, I should n't wonder but her ancestry goes back a couple of hundred years. Of course you'd never mistake her, for a Mayflower Descendant, you know, but her people might have come over in the *Blessing of the Bay*, say. That vessel did n't land at Plymouth, you know, but at Salem, and not till 1630. Ten years makes a lot of difference to an ancestor in America."

She laughed and left him to his point of view and his dilemma, for she had started him and he would go straight enough to the inevitable climax. Haulick Smagg required



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new attention now, for he was developing rapidly in a new direction.

Haulick Smagg, in fact, had suddenly become the victim of a yearning for Art. He longed for expression. Many days of dalliance in Dolly Van Dream's studio and the workrooms of similar academic painters had inspired in him a desire for creation. He wanted to go and do likewise; have admiring visitors "oh!" and "ah!" at his canvases while he shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. This fitted Lady Méchante's plans to a T. She established him in a studio on Twenty-third Street and bought him the paraphernalia of his craft, taking care that his stretchers should be huge, his colors violent. She expected something elemental, titanic. She would know now how the cave man graved his mammoth upon the reindeer's horn.

Nor was she disappointed.

For a while she left him alone with his genius, while the roc's egg hatched. Not by one maxim or platitude, such as guided his course in society, did she direct his path in art. Round the second corner in his career he must steer alone. She had wound him up and set him but for this, and she anticipated delight in his wild curves and flights. The mechanics of it was easy enough. He had seen paints mixed and applied. He had seen painters at work, with nude models posed stiffly against leather screens or draperies. He had seen artists imitate the photograph with realism, or imitate the mist with impressionism. He had studied still life and *genre*. He had seen men frame nature and dismember it. Which would he choose? Calm, sane tonalities, or the perfervid rapture of pure color?

A week, two weeks, elapsed before Lady Méchante dared





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visit his studio, but at the first peep through the door she shrieked with delight and astonishment. No well-bred nudes, no complacent landscapes or still lifes confronted her. The vision was stunning; a less courageous mind than hers would have thought it horrid. On the easel, upon the wall, or standing upon the floor, here, there, and everywhere, impossible of escaping, were such pictures drawn with such ferocity, colored with such violent hues, as made the place desperate. His canvases challenged reason, defied art, boldly proclaimed themselves for the impossible. The outrageous appeal of the primitive had called forth monsters from his brush.

But, by every law of Nietzsche, he had proved himself no decadent. His wild art was ascendant. Surely it was a surplus of life that had urged him to his fearful work; he had painted, not to express himself but to satisfy himself — to create a new world. He had come to his “will to power” — he had evoked new objects of desire. What ravenous hunger stimulated him she well knew, for she had marked the rise of his virile mentality — she was prepared for this outburst of fiery emotion and rejoiced.

Yet it was not this apotheosis of the ugly that surprised her most. Wild work she had expected and desired, but that he had in his initial conception and in his utter abrogation of technique happened unconsciously to fall in line with the latest cry of Paris was miraculous. He, who had never been in France, who had never seen a single disciple of its school, was of “les fauves” — he was a Wild Beast — wilder, if possible, than Dérain, as wild as Czobel or Picasso. Haulick Smagg, as the first priest of Horror, had brought the unholy doctrine at last into New York.

Exquisitely modern herself, she had long been familiar

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with the new revolt against Impressionism in Paris. She had followed that crazy little band of artists when, in their first break away from tradition, they had been dubbed the "Incoherents"; followed them till Matisse took the lead of the "Invertebrates." In two weeks Haulick Smagg had proved himself more invertebrate, more incoherent, than the wildest Beast. He had no classic education to forget or eschew; he had neither mottled his canvases with pigment nor laid on his tones transparent with turpentine. So, without imitation, with no knowledge of the vocabulary of "les fauves," with no prating of "harmonies of volume," voicing no scorn for "mere charm," his native abandon had eclipsed the maddest of these foreign sensationalists.

The rudely carven African gods that had delighted and stimulated Dérain, the Alaskan totem poles to which Picasso was indebted for his fury, the Aztec graven images that had urged Czobel to his ferocity, were all unknown to Haulick Smagg. Unknown was the simplicity of Egyptian sculptures, the directness of Hindoo indecency, the ingenuous frankness of Bayeux broderies, the *naïf* freaks of Malayan or Fijian art. He had for a stimulus only a hunger for something more furiously emotional than he had seen, more blood-curdling, more dire. Matisse, the Master, drew women with six fingers. Smagg drew them with twelve or thirteen. Picasso drew them with triangles; Smagg's were fused trapezoids. Dérain's shrill blues and tumultuous reds, Czobel's harsh greens, and Picasso's hot yellows Smagg, in his artistic orgy, rework into crazier forms. His nudes, if they were nudes, these jagged nightmare-hued objects, were revolting to the ordinary spectator, not with suggestive nakedness, but with their immoral, unspeakable garments of frenetic color.

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Lady Méchante, seeing all this, perceived that Smagg's wings had begun to sprout. How long could she hold him?

She had found the outer door ajar and had gone in to wander in amazement through the studio for a while, gloating over his barbaric essays. Now she noticed upon the table a huge white bowl of liquid red paint standing on the exact center. She was looking at it, smiling, at no loss to interpret its meaning, when Smagg burst in bearing a leather suit-case. He looked up at her like a hound.

"What do you think of 'em?"

"I want to know what they mean, first."

"Don't you know?"

"Yes, but do *you*?"

He set down the suit-case and opened it. Out tumbled a model cube of white painted wood, a glass sphere, and a piece of intricately twisted telegraph wire. He placed them affectionately upon the table, then stepped back and regarded them musingly. "How do you like them?" he asked. "Do *they* mean anything, too?"

She caressed the crystal sphere gently. "I suppose this is a symbol of simplicity and unity"—she touched the telegraph wire—"as this is of complexity." She looked at him out of the corner of her eyes as if anxious as to his reply.

"Symbols be durned!" He took up the cube, feeling gratefully its edges and corners. "I like 'em for *themselves*, the same as I like *you* for yourself, don't I? I like this cube because it's square and straight and sharp!" He took up the sphere. "I like this because it's round and transparent and heavy." He fingered the telegraph wire. "I like this because it's one thing and yet it squirms into

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a mixed-up mess. It has a character of its own. It's funny, and it makes me happy."

"And this bowl of red paint?" she asked, scarcely able to resist her impulse to hug him.

"I like it because it's RED!" He dipped his big forefinger into it and held up his hand, dripping, as if it had been plunged in blood. So keen was the delight written upon his face that she almost expected him to lick his finger to gain another vivid, sensuous impression. "Can't you understand it?" he asked plaintively. "Can't you see that mere heaviness and squareness and redness are wonderful and compelling?"

"My dear Haulick," she exclaimed, "it's *you* who are wonderful and compelling! You've quite crawled out of the chrysalis! I'm afraid of you. I feel as if I were struggling to hold down a half-filled balloon. If you can only explain your pictures as well — but that would be too much!"

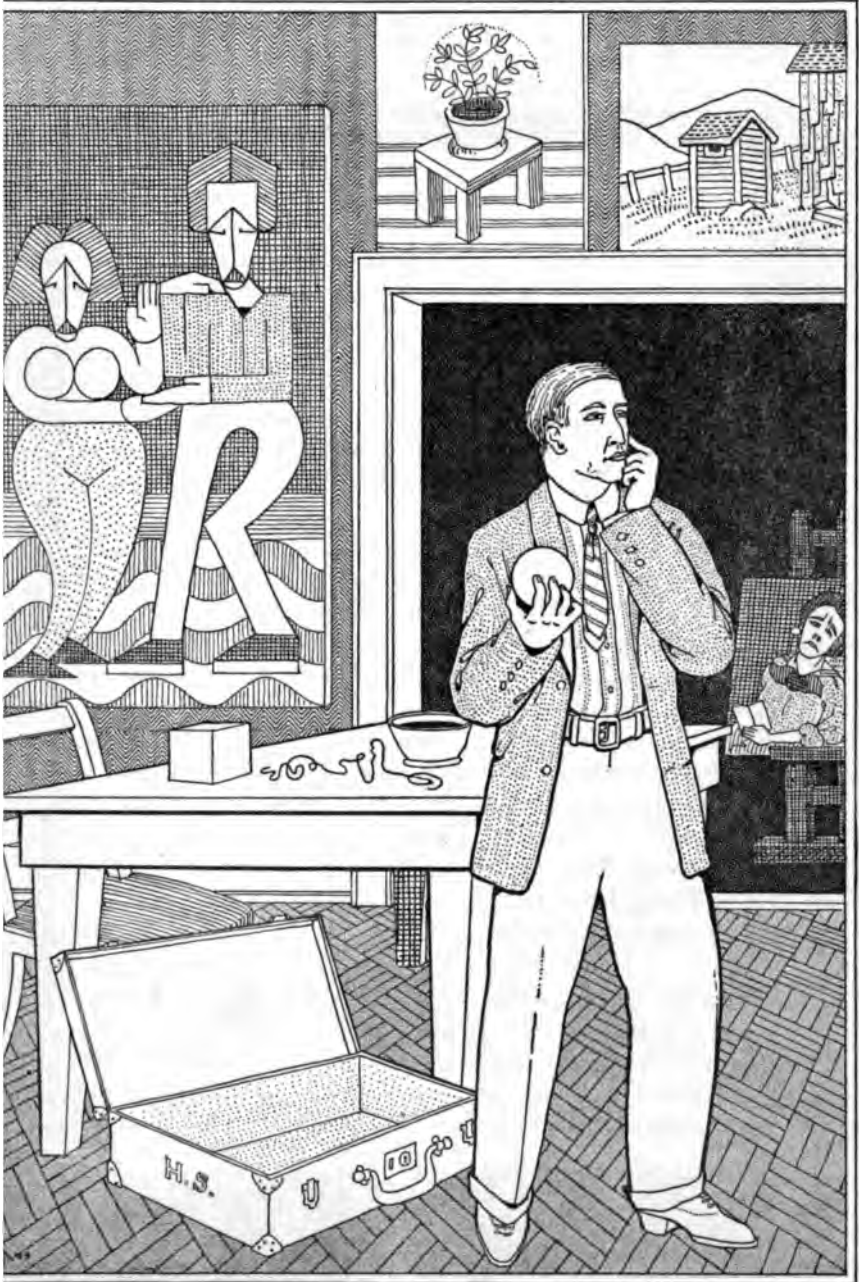
"Do you think they're beautiful?" he asked.

"Well, hardly that."

"Do you think they're ugly?"

"They're not that either, exactly. They're something different to both."

He nodded his head thoughtfully, and his lean, spare face seemed to become faintly transfused with light, as if it were being gradually illuminated by some increasing spark within his brain. Then he spoke slowly. "It's this way, it seems to me." He held up the twisted wire. "Suppose this is beautiful. Now, if I turn it upside down it represents the ugly, we'll say, because the ugly is the opposite of the beautiful." He walked with his symbol toward the mirror. "Then what does the image in the glass mean, I'd



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like to know? It's the beautiful backwards or inside out, ain't it? *That's* what I mean! That's what I tried to paint. I don't know what you call it, but it's a new kind of beauty that no one's ever seen. And, by Gawd, it's *my* kind! I've felt it all my life, dimly. I can't do it yet, but that's what I'm after."

"My dear amiable Titan," she said, going up to him and taking his hand, "if you only knew it, there are hundreds of young men in Paris who are after the same thing and have n't come half as near to it as you have. Before long you'll be talking of 'harmonies of volume,' too!"

And while he listened rapt, she told him of "les fauves" and the school of experimenters who were pursuing the neo-primitive in Montmartre and Montparnasse. She told him of Picasso, who, since Matisse had said the triangle was the symbol of the absolute, had contrived huge, colored females entirely of triangles and named them "Absolute Woman." She told of Chabot, the gay-hearted Provençal, who did his landscapes with thick black lines, as if by a red-hot poker. She told him of Herbin, whose perspectives were more violent than the Japanese. Lastly, she told him of the Japanese, too, who cast no shadows, portraying the Thing Itself.

"And I suppose that, like them, you use no models," she ended. "I don't know where you'd get a woman to paint such things from, unless she'd been through an earthquake and half a dozen railroad accidents."

"Models? Of course I used them! Pretty girls, too, you'd call 'em, some of 'em; some of 'em homely. Can't a homely woman have bulk and — what was it you called it?"



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“Harmony of volume,” she smiled. “You’ve come to it at last; I thought you would.”

He threw out his hands in a despairing gesture. “Don’t you understand? I don’t try to paint what I *see*—that’s what they all do, and it can’t be done! I paint what I *feel* when I look at a thing. Why, see here; what did you tell me yourself about this here Chopin—that prelude he did in a thunder-storm, was n’t it? He did n’t try to imitate thunder on the piano, or rain, or waves, or anything like that. But when you played it I felt like I was dying. That’s what I want to do. When I see a thing I like, it gives me a kind of an ache somewhere. I ain’t trying to paint the thing; I’m painting the ache, kind of.”

“My poor fellow, how you must have suffered!”

Lady Méchante gazed at the representation of a flayed female on an easel. One arm was curved like the handle of a pitcher; the other was as angular as a fylfot. The lady’s toes were like a coarse tooth comb upon the end of her oblong feet. There was Smagg’s beauty, not intrinsic, but subjective, forthright in his primitive, direct appeal to the emotions. With all its decorative might, she could, by standing mentally upon her head, see that the thing had feeling. It was no mere message to the senses.

“If we can only keep it out of the Sunday supplements,” she said thoughtfully, “and get it into the heads of one or two I know, I’ll soon have you another title. You’ll be as famous in Art as you are in Society. By the way, how are you getting along at the Van Dreams’ now? I’ve quite lost sight of you.”

“Oh, that’s so,” said Smagg. “The old lady wanted me to come up this afternoon and go over a list of people she wants to invite for a dinner dance. I’m afraid she’s going



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to ask two or three débutantes I don't like the looks of, and she had a rotten wine last time. I guess I'll run up and see that she does it right."

He took up a pound tube of Prussian blue and squeezed it viciously till it squirmed like a snake all over his immense palate, then daubed a fat brush into the fierie color.

Chapter Eight

SMAGG IN APOGEE

I warrant you, you shall see me prove the very periwig to cover the pate of brainless gentility.

(Antonio and Mellida.)



AS Lady Méchante, *alias* Mrs. Nelly Hellysh, left Dolly Van Dream's own sitting-room, she was plucked at in the hall by a handsome and distinguished footman and drawn into the reception room. Bradford's eyes were alight with emotion; Bradford's hands trembled. He had dropped his servility in this clandestine retreat and was once more the Scion of Shays' Rebellion.

"What do you think?" he whispered. "I have discovered the most tremendous piece of graft and corruption ever known! There's an outrageous traffic going on in this house and, I believe, in almost every other big Fifth Avenue residence, that will make the most sensational articles ever printed in a magazine. Why, I'll only have to pick my editors and name my terms!"

"Whatever do you mean? Have you ferreted out the Shame of the Débutantes, or Frenzied Lingerie, the Crimes of the Chaperones, or what?"

"Oh, it's too revolting! All these butlers, it seems, take tips from their millionaire employers for teaching them etiquette in their leisure moments. They've leagued themselves together and concocted all sorts of new rules of de-



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portment for society. By this time the millionaires are completely under the thumbs of the butlers. The location of the forks and spoons on the table is changed every week, so nobody will know how to use them without instruction. Same way with the handshake, with visiting cards, and all sorts of things. How to use a valet, tipping in country houses, good form at the opera—all extra. They're trying to make the whole thing so complicated that nobody will know what to do or how to do it. Why, I've seen butlers bully their employers in a way to make your blood run cold! It's come to a pass where these merchant princes never know whether they're good form or not till they have their daily lesson. These butlers won't let a man see his own friends if they don't like them. They can pronounce a *débutante declassée*, and she can't get to a dinner in a season. You would n't believe how far it's gone, and it's getting worse every day."

"Well, how are you going to cope with it? Have you a remedy?"

"Surely. I'm going to propose the establishment of a clearing-house for visiting-cards at the Plaza Hotel. Then nobody will have to call at all. Every card will be credited and statements issued every month. The same way with the dinners. Mrs. A. will give a promissory note for one to Mrs. B. Mrs. B. will do the same for Mrs. A., and when the books are balanced the whole thing will be evened up without dining at all. It will rescue the millionaires from the clutches of the butlers, and give them time and opportunity to enjoy themselves in a sane human fashion."

"You will become famous!"

"I should say so," said Bradford, exultantly. "For the first time in my life I'll achieve a 'blurb.' There'll be a



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blurb in the magazines booming me as the newest muck-raker, a blurb on the paper jacket of my book telling how many heart throbs there are in the volume, and blurbs in the advertising columns of the papers saying that thirteen editions were exhausted before publication, blurbs in the Editor's Guff of the Twocenter Magazine blurbing me as their latest discovery. "I'm going to be discovered, Mrs. Hellysh; there's no doubt about that now!"

"Fancy Wrestling Brewster Bradford being discovered! Fancy the author of 'Essays in Enchantment' being discovered — in a muck heap!"

Bradford looked far away, through the silken tapestry of the wall, through the shell of French Renaissance to where lay his dream. Lady Méchante called him out of his reverie. "And how about Dolly?" she asked.

He started convulsively and looked at her. "I can't get her out of my mind," he said; "she seems so incongruous here in the midst of all this mere vulgar wealth. It doesn't seem to rub off on her at all, somehow; she's like a white pigeon in the slums. I hate to think of her as being below me. Mrs. Hellysh, I am seriously intrigued; I am very much afraid that I am in danger of becoming entangled in a *mésalliance*."

"Oh, Mr. Bradford!" she cried, clasping her hands. "Think of your mother! Think of your sister — think of the Colonial Skirmishers! You, a nephew-in-law of a Secretary of the Descendants of the Survivors of the Indian Massacres! Let me beg of you to think twice before you offer your hand to the daughter of a mere millionaire."

"Oh, it's not in that quality that I shall offer myself," he replied. "In fact, I don't want her to know that I'm in any way her superior. I want her to love me for myself

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alone. If she accepts me as a simple footman, I'll know her heart's all right, and she will be worthy to be a Scion-by-marriage of Shays' Rebellion."

"James!" Miss Van Dream's voice came singing down the hall, searching her lackey. Lady Méchante hurriedly withdrew.

It was lucky for the footman's peace of mind and matrimonial air castles that he did not hear a conversation that was even then taking place in the library, where old lady Van Dream, gazing indulgently at poor Smagg, was unburdening a mother's breast. Haulick Smagg, in pin-pointed morning coat, in fawn waistcoat and shepherd's-plaid trousers, was giving negligent attention, dividing his interest in her with a petulant Pomeranian puppy that gnawed at his heels.

"I don't know what I'm going to do with Dolly," said Mrs. Van Dream.

"Well, I guess you need n't worry. If there's anything going to be done, she'll do it herself."

"Ah, but this is a thing she can hardly do herself."

"Why not? Ain't she clever enough?"

"But this is a man's work, Mr. Smagg."

"She can do a bigger man's work than most men I know. I seen her pick up and carry a wad of clay as heavy as a cartwheel the other day."

"Oh, it is n't a question of strength, but of delicacy."

"What is it then, Lulu? Out with it!"

"Can't you guess, Mr. Smagg?" She assumed a sentimental attitude. "I want Dolly to be happy."

"Why, ain't she happy? She looks all right. I should say she'd gained four pounds in the last week."





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“She needs protection. She needs a man to lean upon. She needs *you*, Mr. Smagg.” She watched the effect of her words anxiously.

“First I ever heard of it,” said Smagg, kicking the Pomeranian till it yelped.

“She would n’t be likely to tell you; she would n’t want you to know.”

“What do *you* tell me for then?”

“Because I know you love her. I know my mother’s eyes are not deceived.” She added soulfully: “You can’t deceive me, Mr. Smagg. I am never mistaken in these things. I can feel your vibrations.”

“Huh!” said Smagg. “You may feel ’em, but I’ll be durned if I can.”

She shook her finger at him playfully. “I know! You men are all alike.”

“If they’re all alike, would n’t somebody else do just as well?” Smagg was sullen.

“Do you mean to say you don’t want to marry her? Why, you’ve been paying her all sorts of attentions.”

He began to fear the old lady; like a spider she was drawing him into her web. For the first time he felt unable to cope with her. As a last resource he fell back on his *vade mecum*.

“Well,” he said, “there was once a fox —”

She shook her finger at him playfully. “Oh, I know, I know,” she said. “But Dolly will be well provided for, Mr. Smagg. I’ll see to that. You won’t find me ungenerous.”

“I’d rather marry you,” said Smagg. “There ain’t quite enough of her to suit me.”

Mrs. Van Dream, though not displeased, pursued the subject. “Don’t you think she’s pretty?”

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"I don't know," said Smagg, thoughtfully. "She might do. I'll think it over. You was n't thinking of getting married yourself, I suppose?"

"My dear boy, I'm old enough to be your mother; I hope I *shall* be your mother before long."

"Mother-in-laws are a pile different from mothers, from all I hear."

He left Mrs. Van Dream dangling in doubt, yet hoping against hope that this interesting young man, who had made such a furore in her set and was fast becoming a society leader, would, before long, become a member of the family.

She had spoken of Dolly's happiness, voicing her maternal instinct more than Dolly's own views on the subject. Mother and daughter had indulged in touching confidences, one to the other, but, though Dolly acknowledged that she was fascinated, she was by no means sure she was willing to marry any such society comet as Smagg had proved to be, social arbiter though he might become.

True, most of the traces of what Dolly had called "smaggery" had vanished. He no longer smagged flies. He did not smagg into a room in the old way she had laughed at, nor did he smagg his food. He fell asleep less often upon the couch when he was bored; he seldom cleaned his nails in public now, or spat upon the sidewalk. But he had lost none of his virility; he radiated force. Indeed, his very smaggery, transformed, sublimated in the world of art, had thrilled her even more deeply than she had been thrilled that evening that he smagged her when the lights went out.

She was, in fact, his first disciple, the first eagerly to accept his ideas and manufacture phrases by which to justify



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them. She had rallied the more radical of both the groups she led, the Intellectuals and the Endowed. Already one heard much of "harmonies of volume," much diatribe directed against "mere charm." Dolly herself was incapable of wielding her own brush in so heroic a manner, but something in his masculine potency of appeal she answered to. Answered sub-consciously as yet; for, as yet, she thought herself moved more by a theory than by a man. Intellectually and emotionally she embraced his ideas, but embracing Smagg himself was a different matter. She could not yet forget his smaggery that appeared as the scratches on his varnish, when, occasionally, he yawned or stared. Still, he disturbed her. Many a night she wet her pillow with her tears, wondering how such a man could move her.

But he was to move her more, consciously and unconsciously, in intellect and in emotion; for Smagg's wings grew from day to day. He had turned his second corner. His surplus vitality urged him on. His lesson learned, he found the task too easy. He grew like a weed. He was now almost free of Lady Méchante's guidance and observation. The platitudes with which he had won his entrance into society were discarded, for he no longer needed them. The bromidic views upon the Submerged Tenth with which she had so artfully impregnated his mental system were, in this new phase, thrown off, defeated by the virile power of Smagg's new-fledged mind. He no longer indulged in polite asteisms and pedantic patronage with regard to Socialism. Seeing the old industrial order was as bad as could be conceived, he flew to the ranks of the only camp of thought that offered a remedy.

He marveled at the heavy, useless burdens of the rich — their unnecessary responsibilities, their fatuous frivolity, their



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foolish harness of fashion. He marveled at their unconsciousness of so much he considered essential in life. Why, they were like hunting-dogs who used their ears and noses, but never their eyes. He heard them talking freely of themselves and each other before servants, as if they were being waited on by deaf-mutes. He saw men everywhere dominated by women, and women scarcely ever clever enough to profit by their advantage save in the most petty transactions. He marveled at men who owned a hundred and fifty pairs of shoes apiece, and women apparently with six husbands each. And all kept up the marvelous game of hypocrisy, each pretending to the other that he was doing something everyone knew he was n't. How they boasted of their chains!

And much he marveled at that sad, equivocal creature who, occulted by the brilliance of rich relatives, wore her pathetic masquerade as lady in the world she had all but lost. He watched these "companions," or social secretaries, belike, and when occasion offered gave them sympathy in their dubious state. While on country visits he often saw one of these hapless, luckless ones in her decayed gentility when the house was crowded share her room with a maid without daring to protest. He saw her in the city carrying dogs across the street like lackeys. He saw her on the front seats of motor-cars, when gentlemen rode inside. He saw her in hotels, going down to breakfast in the dining-room to save the fifty-cent service in her room. He saw her forced to stay indoors on a Sunday afternoon, when the servants went free. He saw her spending herself in an infinite number of capacities, as maid, trained nurse, secretary, dressmaker, milliner — or, when a fourth lady failed to appear, he saw her come down to dinner in a made-





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over gown of her rich aunt's, which did not spare her youth and shadowed her freshness — a strange, timid creature, drowning in a sea of affluent success. He saw how, every time a man made bold to speak to her, the whole family listened with eager ears, and five minutes afterwards tore out of her heart the secret of his attention. He saw her in her isolation, with not an evening to herself, with the impossibility of making friends, taking tea and desperate chances with personable young men in clandestine rendezvous when she was supposed to be shopping. Truly, it had no tendency to teach her to be truthful, this régime; her one object in life, he discovered, was to deceive her employer. Employer? Never that, of course! Did she not have presents of her rich aunt's old hats — black things with little stick-ups in them? Did not her rich aunt instruct her how to wear her hair in a prim, old-fashioned, inconspicuous manner, so as to be uncompromisingly labeled as dependent?

From such as these, in stolen interviews, he learned much of life, and wondered at this sacrifice of virgins. Why, down on Delancey Street where he had lived, the working girls had a Settlement House, where amiable young socialistic millionaires met them on terms of equality, took them out riding, gave them the best of modern culture! Here celebrated authors and foreign statesmen came, till the girls were surfeited with opportunity. Here the best music was played, select clubs were established, motor cars could be had free for Sundays, and excursions were planned for every holiday. He told these poor companions about it, and urged them to emigrate to the slums, where they could be sure of every social advantage and an occasional evening off for diversion — amateur theatricals trained by New York's



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cleverest young men, and lectures on Fridays by the world-famous. But ever they hugged the delusion of caste, and dwelt purblind in their slavery.

Once started, he went faster and faster. He roamed hungrily from one art to another, all that was primitive in him rejoicing in all that was modern. Herein lay no paradox, for Smagg had but to look upward and see modernity over his head. The cycle of culture in its spiral rise had completed the circle, and had returned to view from a higher altitude the clean-cut truths which had, at the beginning of the helix, inspired the primal man.

“Architecture!” said Smagg, one day, looking up from Lady Méchante’s photographs and engravings, after listening to her lecture, “there’s been no such thing since that first drunk and disorderly Dago tripped over a smashed Corinthian capital and saw it for the first time after he and the rest of ’em had been messing around it for a thousand years. That there Renaissance you been talking about was nothing but a surgical operation for the emasculation of thought, the first idiot ‘correspondence school’ for the suppression of intellect. Fenestrations and ratios! Men were so crazy about their foot-rulers they’d rather measure an old cornice than figure out a new groined arch. They’ve been playing a game of dominoes ever since, with every third counter a double-blank! It took brains and blood to build Karnak and the Parthenon and St. Mark’s and Durham and Chartres! But these modern monkeys are only working out puzzle-pictures for fools, and when they get the chopped-up bits of “Columbus Crossing the Delaware” or “Washington Discovering America” they expect me to yelp! A man would think the Parthenon had gone wrong and come over and littered all over Man-



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hattan! Greek temples for bun-shops, Greek temples for Subway-entrances, and Greek temples for garages! Judging from the Pennsylvania Station, how far have we advanced from the Taj Mahal? Is the Singer Building better than the Doge's palace? And how about that bum Cathedral, that garbage box with the badly fozzled approach? Is it up to the standard of any little old parish church in England?

"Oh, I've been talking with these architect-chaps who think on a scale of one-sixteenth-of-an-inch-to-the-foot, and I know what's wrong. There's a bucket-shop called the *École des Beaux-Arts* over in Paris where the little Yankee kids go and give up the last bit of small change of feeling they have, and they get in return a bunch of stock-certificates in a bum gold-brick mine that was played out before it was ever dug, and is now nothing but a *rive gauche* Rathskeller where the *menu* is hash, sausage, and dope. Then they chest themselves back over the Atlantic, and the hayseeds of high-life gurgle, 'Oh, ain't them colyums and consoles and cartouches elegant!' That's all they get — a Parisian version of a Renaissance misunderstanding of a Roman translation of the original Greek! Gawd! every time I see an Ionic column I know it's a vulgar gravestone in memory of the unknown dead. Yes, I know they's a few men trying to do Gothic, though they ain't got Gothic minds. Well, they're butchering a real style, anyway; and they're to be pitied, because they know right from wrong. But these academic asses, I envy 'em. They don't even know there *is* any such thing as right!"

In music, also, he dared to walk without a guide. An evening at the Chinese theater set him a-wondering. "What's everybody so afraid of discords for?" he asked

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afterwards. "They're all slaves to the old forms and the old intervals. What difference does it make if G flat vibrates thirty-two thousand times a second and A sharp forty-one thousand, or whatever it is? You can prove there's a mathematical ratio that's what we call harmony, but you can't prove some other ratio won't give some other kind of a psychological effect, can you? Why ain't the interval of a fourth as good as that of a fifth or a third?"

"Oh, it's been tried," said Lady Méchante. "Grieg used it; so did Tschaiikowsky and Dvořák. But it was a sort of compromise; they did n't dare trust new harmonies as the modern Frenchmen have. Listen to this!" and she sat down to the piano and played a few measures of Debussy.

"What d' you think of it?" she asked, watching him queerly.

Smagg's gaze roved. He put his hand to his head, puzzled. "It makes me feel funny," he said, at last. "I never heard anything before that made me feel so queer. It reminds me of something. And, somehow, I can seem to hear notes you don't play at all. How is that?"

"I believe you hear the overtones!" she cried, and she explained the theory of vibrations to him.

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "That fellow's got the idea. The reason why most people can't understand it is because their ears are wrong. They're so used to the well-known intervals they can't catch anything new. I've heard tell that there's some insect notes so high we can't hear 'em. Well, there can be some kind of harmonies so new and subtle we can't understand 'em, can't there?"

Lady Méchante played on, softly and dreamily. "How



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can I tell what you may hear, O cave man?" she murmured. "We have gone back; civilization has robbed us of our pristine sense of smell — we can no longer scent our friends and enemies — it has robbed us of our ears, too — once we lived in the woods — we listened for the tiniest sounds — we heard things that are now imperceptible to our auditory nerves — we heard, perhaps, all overtones — we have lost our ears! — have not Strauss and Debussy found them for us, — and you, O Troglodyte?" She finished her *Pelleas*.

"What's them black keys for?" asked Smagg.

She explained the diatonic scale.

"But why does there have to be half tones between three and four and seven and eight? Why can't you go up, a whole tone at a time?"

"Ah!" She jumped up and nearly kissed him; not quite. "You *can!*" she exclaimed. Then she played a queer old rune, an ancient Greek chorus, and Smagg's eyes opened wide. She repeated, by ear, the Chinese song he had heard. She hummed a primordial chant, thousands of years old.

"There! I knew it!" she said. "Yours is the pentatonic scale; like Strauss, you know its mysterious harmonies, which men call dissonance! How else could it be but that you should comprehend the most ancient and the most modern of music!"

"There's one queer thing about it," said Smagg. "I like it, but I can't hear it! When you play something I like, it makes me feel funny. I forget to think. I go off like in a dream, and so I don't hear it at all. But when you play anything cheap, I hear it all right, but it makes me itch!"

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"There's the tragedy of music," said Lady Méchante. "She's so beautiful that she's invisible! Lucky for you you're not a technician and don't understand the mathematics of the science. I envy you!"

"Well," said Smagg, gripping his chin in his fist, "I'd like to try writing some of that stuff, all the same. I believe I could show that French chap a thing or two!"

Lady Méchante was one, at least, who quite believed him capable of it.

Before he had turned his third corner Lady Méchante had, in an idle moment, planned for him a literary career. She knew what marvelous chances the beginner had in America; how often, while the work of old established writers was rejected, the first sign of a new writer from Ypsilanti or Barriboo would be hailed with wild acclaim by the editors. The manuscript might be rejected, but the author would be welcomed with complimentary letters requesting the sight of all future work; and, if the second contribution were tolerable, special envoys, literary confidence men, were sent out to lunch and dine the new-born celebrity. Blurbed into a moment's scintillating fame, how many a young star she had seen rise, glitter, and fall back into the dark to perish in the black unknown! How many prize-winners had been discovered, touted, and left by the wayside!

She had even blocked out for him a series of stories that should begin his career — little masterpieces of originality and unconventionality. There was one for *Macaboor's* about a heroic brakeman who climbed over the tender, half burned to death in a forest fire, and rescued the engineer, — a "sincere" tale. There was the story of a coward whose physi-



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cal fear was adroitly contrasted with his spiritual courage. This was "convincing." There was a football story, for a November number, in which the despised Freshman inspired by a pretty co-ed, scored a touchdown for his eleven. There was a story of very poor whites who spoke unintelligible dialect, one of a tender-hearted cowboy with red hair. There was a story of a picturesque lover, *versus* a practical husband, in which the heroine was referred to as the Beautiful Lady. There was the story of a "cub" reporter, who achieved a "scoop," with much local color ("copy readers," "city desks," "flimsies," and so on). There was the story of a homely girl, who being (as they always are) kind and tactful, won over a pretty, feather-headed rival. There was a Christmas story where Somebody Came Back. Animal stories, of fleas and mosquitoes conversing together. Story of an Under Dog. How the Old Automobile won the Race. Story of an impossibly precocious and sentimental child—and so on. In all these she used for a title the Inverted Possessive dear to the editor's soul, usually the "Rehabilitation of Somebody."

These rough sketches she had cast aside for poetry; for, while he was but partly evolved, it pleased her fancy to speculate upon the kind of verse he would be likely to indite.

Long afterwards she picked a manuscript out of a pigeon-hole of her escritoire and showed it to him.

"Here!" she said. "This is what I was going to have you pull out of your inside pocket some night at Highbrow Hall. What do you think of it? Would you have been proud to acknowledge the authorship?" She read it to him, mimicking his smaggish manner:



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“Blood of the meat —
Soul of the flesh, striving in sinew and gristle,
Burrowing bone,
Lusty in fatherhood, riotous giver of life —
Crassly I crunch at the corpse,
Drinking its force,
Robbing the strength of the beast !
Lo, thou hast pilfered the grasses,
Soul of their flesh !
Lo; they have sifted the rocks
To capture the spirit of Life!
Dwell in my carcass and build it,
Ere in the round of thy going
Back to the earth that hath whelped me,
Little and weak,
Thin through the leaf and the stalk,
Thou climbest thy path to fulfillment.”

Smagg scowled, reached for it, and looked it over. Then he pointed to a word. “I never would have said ‘capture.’”

Lady Méchante shrieked. “That’s a fact. Of course you would n’t. Bless your big Anglo-Saxon heart! I believe you’ve picked out the only Latin word in the poem. I would like to see what you would write now if you tried.” Smagg in his orbit was at this time rounding the focus of its parabola.

He gloomed for a while, then paced the floor heavily. He stopped suddenly once or twice, glared at her and went on. He walked to the window and looked out, rubbed his nose against the pane, then thoughtfully inspected the grease spot on the glass. He snapped his fingers and came back, stopped and tapped his toes and scowled again. He exhibited, in short, all the tricks and manners of a minor poet absorbed in composition.

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Lady Méchante watched him with infinite amusement. "Can you do it?" she asked. "Did you catch a sight of your muse out of the window?"

He shoved his hands in his pockets, and his soul shot out of his eyes, terrible.

"How *can* I do it?" he demanded. "How can anybody do it that's decent? Poetry is the language of feeling, ain't it? You can't put it into words. Even them pictures of mine don't put it into words; no more does music. Nobody means what they say when they write lyrics; if they did, they ought to be ashamed of themselves. When you have a feeling that's poetic, it's like having a woman you're in love with. No man as *is* a man wants to go to work and expose it for everybody to stare at. If a poet come to see me, I'd kick him downstairs and then go and wipe my shoes on the mat!

"All the same," he continued, "I'll give it to you if you want to hear it; but you understand this is something sacred and holy; it's a part of the mystery of my own being; it's like a love-letter, I expect; it's the sort of thing one does n't confess.

"My shirt is sticky and clings to my back,
Gawd, my Gawd, but I'd like to cry!
I got up at night and stepped on a tack,
Gawd, but I want to die!

"I got some ink under my thumb-nail,
Gawd, my Gawd, but I'd like to cry!
I had to laugh at a thrice-told tale,
Gawd, but I want to die!

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“I got my hair all covered with glue,
Gawd, my Gawd, but I'd like to cry!
I wiped my face on a towel new,
Gawd, but I want to die!

“I seen a guy with a light blue scarf,
Gawd, my Gawd, but I'd like to cry!
And a pretty girl with a horrid laugh,
Gawd, but I want to die!”

“Ah, I see,” said Lady Méchante, the tears in her eyes. “It's wonderfully beautiful. You are right. These are quite the things a delicate person hesitates to confess. And rhythmic, of course. That's where I failed. I forgot that all prehistoric poetry is rhythmic. In yours I hear the cadenced rune of the ancient tribal dances. I can almost hear the tomtoms and see the naked forms in the firelight. I should have known you would be atavistic.”

“Say,” Smagg exclaimed suddenly, “what do you think old lady Van Dream told me today? Said she wanted me to marry Dolly.”

Lady Méchante jumped up. “Not really?”

What was there in her look now that had not been there before? Something slumbering awoke. Her breath came quickly.

“What did you say?”

“I said, ‘Not much!’ or, leastways, I'd think it over. What I meant was, I'd ask you. What do you think?”

“What do *you* think?” she asked eagerly.

“Oh, she's got money and plenty of hair—that's the main thing. But I rather prefer the old lady, myself. More to her. Besides, she's on to things. Dolly might do—so long as I could n't possibly—I mean, of course—”





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“What ever *do* you mean?” said Lady Méchante.

Smagg walked off to the window again, found the grease spot still there on the pane, and gazed at it morosely. “I don’t know what I do mean; only sometimes I feel funny.”

She watched him through half-closed lids, then turned away, and sighed. “I expect you had better marry her, Haulick,” she said decidedly. Her lips closed tightly.

“All right,” said Haulick, gloomily. “I’ll propose to her tomorrow.”

He did propose on the morrow, heavy-heartedly enough, but with sufficient unction to impress Miss Van Dream, who, warned by her mother, had lain awake half the night wondering what she should say to him. What she did say was merely that she wanted time. She was n’t ready yet to decide so important a question. Little Emily, she knew, would have snapped him up in a minute. Almost every other girl in her set would, smaggery or no smaggery. That was in itself, she admitted, good reason for taking him. She began to feel the man himself, now, more strongly than his art; but there was something too clever about him. There was no knowing where such a cat would jump.

So Smagg went away, not too disheartened at being put off.

He had hardly gone before James, the footman, appeared to remove the tea things. He had been in and out during the whole interview and, as Dolly Van Dream, with characteristic *aplomb*, had ignored his presence as a human being, he had heard the entire conversation through with imperturbable gravity. Smagg’s one failing had always



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been a fear of servants — public waiters excepted — and he would have become awkwardly embarrassed had his proposal been more enthusiastic. But Smagg had been plunged in turgid thoughts, of which the reader is supposed to know nothing. James had waited a decent interval after this tender episode, and now laid his tray on the table and approached his mistress with a sentimental expression upon the face which so long had been masked in sobriety.

“I’d like to speak to you, Miss Van Dream, if I might be so bold,” he said.

Dolly raised her eyebrows and regarded him with surprise. “Why, what is it, James? Have you anything to complain of? Are n’t they giving you real cream in your coffee, or what is it? I hope you are not going to tell me you want to marry one of the maids.”

“No, Miss Van Dream, it’s not one of the maids I wish to marry. It’s *you*, if you don’t mind me saying of it.”

“James, I hope you have n’t been helping yourself to the brandy! I gave strict orders that it was to be kept locked up.”

James shook his head. “No, Miss Van Dream. It is n’t the brandy. If I’m intoxicated, it’s you that’s done it, in a way of speaking.”

How he restrained himself! How hard he strived to copy the manner of the best English servants as depicted in the best society novels! He longed to lapse into dialect, to say “mem,” and to drop his “b’s,” but he was not yet sure of the proper idiom and accent. He did his best with the few of Hallroom’s novels he had been able to read.

“I don’t think you quite know what you are saying, James,” said Dolly, rising and looking about her uneasily.





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“I do know what I’m saying, Miss Van Dream, if you please, for I have said it often enough to myself. I have been in this house and in your service, man and boy, for two weeks; and it was a long, long time before I could make bold to tell you about it. But I love you, Miss Van Dream, and, if you would be contented to marry a poor man, so far beneath you, I can offer you a heart, Miss Van Dream, that has as much devotion as you have dollars. I am afraid I can’t put it very well to the likes of you, but I’ve heard tell you’re a Socialist, and I went and joined the Party so’s to be able to call you ‘comrade’ without being accused of disrespect. It’s on the plane of our common humanity and the cause of Labor that I appeal to you, Miss Van Dream — I beg your pardon — comrade!”

Dolly had listened at first with amusement, then with increasing impatience to scornful fury. She was about to order him out of the room when the first word of his final period caused her to stop and tremble. Her hand flew to her heart. Dolly, the last two weeks, had become as fiery a little Socialist as ever spoke on a street corner. True, she never had spoken on a street corner, for her comrades were theorists of the parlor variety, who had taken it up in a dreamy sort of way, mainly on account of Bernard Shaw. Even thus, however, there was magic in the name “comrade,” and she dared not consider herself insulted.

“You’re quite right, of course, in speaking to me, Comrade James, and your sentiments do you honor. I know I am thoroughly fascinating, and it’s no wonder that you could n’t stand the strain for long. I’m not surprised that you have broken down under it. In fact, I’ve noticed for several days that your manner had changed.

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You winked quite conspicuously yesterday as you passed the fish. Mamma noticed it and thought you were ill. So I think, on the whole, you'd better change your work for something out of doors, where I won't trouble you so much. Can you do anything else but footmanship?"

"I can drive an automobile," said James, hanging his head.

"Very well, then, I'll see about making you a chauffeur. That Frenchman we've had eloped last night with my Aunt Harriet, as you may have heard. If you'll promise not to elope, James — Comrade James, I beg your pardon — I'll see that you are installed. But you must live in the coach house, and you must n't expect any increase in wages."

James took up his tray, placed on it a plate of nibbled tea-cakes, and walked out of the room, his shattered hopes torturing his breast.

Chapter Nine

NEW WORLDS FOR OLD

*Though she have heavenly gifts, virtue and beauty,
Is she not earthly metal, flesh and blood?*

(Campaspe.)



WHAT was the matter with Smagg? Still he pursued his social orbit with increasing splendor, pursued breathlessly by a comet's tail of *débutantes*, *widowettes*, and marrying *mammas*. Still in the studios the proselytizing for Smagg's new order of art went on. He was called "the Master" by many of the younger female art students at the League. True, their attempts at imitation could be received at no regular *salon*, but an independent exhibition had been held, producing a surfeit of smaggery. In both these worlds, Dolly Van Dream followed him, still unable to make up her mind, still unable to distinguish between the genius and the man.

But of late she thought she noticed a slight recrudescence of his smaggery. At one time it was nothing more than the production of a red bandanna handkerchief; at another it was the omission of the handkerchief altogether after a particularly violent sneeze. Smagg, by this time, was a sufficiently important figure to be able to do pretty much what he liked, but what he liked to do was singularly reminiscent of his earlier smaggishness, with the difference that, nowadays, he seemed to do it consciously and with

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defiance. Of this attitude, one of his early *gaucheries* was symbolic. He not only upset his cup on the floor, but he stamped viciously on the fragments. There was that same vicious note in his present mental state. He rubbed things in. She wondered what it meant.

She followed his progress from call to call, to theaters, teas, receptions, house parties, and noticed that he seemed more and more sullen; his badinage often frightened the buds, tough as they had become by the end of the season's dissipation. The young married women, inured to the persistent attacks of male flirts (fair game, now they were wedded, for all sorts of surreptitious amorous annoyance), found Smagg a terror in quite a new way. His mockery of the matrons, his derision of the dowagers, had become blatant, almost offensive. People said he was spoiled, but Dolly knew better. Some yeast was working in his brain.

"Do you know, you have n't paid your dinner call on Mrs. Pendulous yet?" she said to him one day. "It's two weeks since you were there."

"What do I want to go there for?" said Smagg. "The dinner was bad enough, let alone calling again."

"But you *have* to go," Dolly insisted.

"Why, if I don't want to?"

"Because it's the thing to do. You must pay your social debts."

"But she invited me herself. I did n't want to go, anyway. She ought to call on *me!*"

"Oh, we all have to do a great many things we don't want to do."

He thought about it sulkily. "I don't see the good of being in society, then," he grumbled.

"I think I'm very lucky to be able to get down to my



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studio twice a week," Dolly went on. "I'm fearfully behind on my calls now, and I've got to give at least six more dinners and two big receptions to even up my score. I think you ought to consider yourself fortunate."

"You'll be saying I've got to go to Emily's theater party, next, and sit around for three hours in the back of the box when I want to be home in bed."

"Well, if you keep it up as well as you have you'll soon get to the point where you'll be invited to everything and won't have to go to anything, and that's the goal we all hope to reach in time."

"I don't see the fun in being invited to things you don't want to go to. Sounds like nonsense to me."

If Dolly was puzzled at these symptoms of Smagg's uneasiness, Lady Méchante was more so. When he was with her, however, Smagg's demeanor took another air. She was almost frightened at times, and in her encounters she needed every art and ruse with which that fantastic lady was familiar. He would stop suddenly and glower upon her, showing his teeth under his tense upper lip. At times she almost expected this reconstructed cave man to drag her off by the hair of her head to his lair. In point of fact, he did grab her by the wrist savagely enough once; but then the lady's eyes were stilettos, and he cowered and apologized. She had to acknowledge that he was more and more difficult to cope with, like a kitten grown into a wild-cat. Success had given him confidence. Was the distance lessening between them? she thought. Was she, at the top of the spiral, now in closer proximity than ever to Smagg at the bottom, one whole round of the circle behind her? Strangely they had thrilled to the same

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themes, he the barbarian, she effete. What he had looked up to she had looked down upon, but now at times she seemed to meet his gaze full on the level. How long would her brains be a match for his brute strength and will?

He came and went now, his own master. Once or twice he had even offered her advice—her, Lady Méchante, who had played with cities, with societies, with religions, in her time; whose touch was magic, whose fancy was immortal! She had had a queer, numb feeling when he had offered that advice. What if he gave her his orders? What if he forced her will? Already she seemed to hear a warning, like the music of a rattlesnake's tail. It made her numb, indeed, but it awoke a strange, outrageous delight in her which she had never known before.

It was well into May when Lady Méchante drove up to the Van Dreams' in her Pancake to have a talk with Dolly and see how far she had noticed the change. On the pavement she found the new chauffeur at the wheel of the tremendous yellow limousine car of the Van Dreams. At first she did not know him in his leathern uniform, but when she recognized him she went up immediately to ascertain the cause.

Wrestling Brewster Bradford, too, had changed. He told her of his proposal. "And, do you know," he said, "on thinking it over, I'm sure I should n't have liked it at all if she had accepted me as a footman. Why, I would have distrusted every servant I ever had, once I was married to her. No, I selfishly wanted her to like me for myself alone, and I'm now thoroughly ashamed of it. I owe a debt to my ancestry and have no right to leave the Scions of Shays'



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Rebellion out of the question. I'm as much a Scion as I am myself, it seems to me. I am as much a Descendant of the Survivors of the Indian Massacres as I am Wrestling Brewster Bradford. Have n't Elder Brewster, the Pilgrim, and Wrestling, his son, any respect due them? What would the Colonial Skirmishers think? Then, again, my sister is to be considered. Would she want her brother accepted as a footman? The fact is, it's all horribly complicated on account of the aristocracy of my lineage. I've decided to wait until I've got all the material necessary for my book — there are a lot of secrets in the Van Dream family that I have n't wormed out of the butler yet, — then I'm going to propose to her as a gentleman. I suppose she will be frightened to death, but I'll try and make it as easy as I can for her. She never will be a Scion of Shays' Rebellion, but her son will be."

"I think you are quite right," said Lady Méchante, "but I hope you will break it to her gently. Can't you begin with the Mexican War, say, and work gradually back? I would n't let her know that your family is more than two or three generations old, at first. I'd be very careful how I approached the seventeenth century, if I were you, and be sure and not mention the Boston Tea Party until she is thoroughly prepared for the shock. When you get to the Plymouth Colony, I beg of you, go slowly and have the smelling-salts ready. I'd start from Boston and work my way down the Old Massachusetts Trail along the South Shore. When you get to the Plymouth Rock, she'll be ready for the worst."

The running tremor in her voice died out. She smiled saucily and ran up the steps of the chateau. She found Dolly and her mother talking Lenox. They were due at

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their country house, a spick and span Tudor pile they called "Goldmere," early next week. Smagg had already been invited, and Lady Méchante, when she appeared, was made to say that she would run up with them *en auto* on the coming Monday.

"I see you have a new chauffeur," said she who was still called Mrs. Hellysh. "Are you going to trust yourself to him? He does n't look machiny enough to me."

"Oh, my dear, he's remarkably intelligent," said Dolly, "and he knows his place perfectly."

Mrs. Van Dream put in: "He's a perfect servant, really. There must be generations of footmen and butlers behind him, I'm sure. It's written all over him."

So the party was arranged. Lady Méchante, after an unsuccessful attempt to probe the secrets of Dolly's heart, went home to make her preparations for the trip.

They started early in the yellow car, with Wrestling Brewster Bradford at the wheel. Once out of the crowded streets, Smagg's face seemed to grow more and more disconsolate every minute, and he harangued the three ladies gloomily.

"What am I going to Lenox for?" he demanded. "I don't want to go. I don't believe you want to go yourselves. It's just because we all *have* to go, ain't it?"

Lady Méchante spoke up. "You may go because you have to, because you are a society leader and a lion and a Master. Dolly and Mrs. Van Dream have to go because they are harnessed into the chariot and can't escape. But I don't have to go; I don't have to do anything I don't want to. I never have in my life! I'm going because I want to see the fun."



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“What fun?” said Haulick Smagg.

“The fun of seeing you outside of New York. I don’t believe you’ve ever been outside of the city before in your life.”

“No more have I,” he said.

“Why, how absurd!” Mrs. Van Dream put in. “You’ve told us about Marienbad and Monte Carlo and Versailles and the Lido times enough. Why, I’ve seen your trunks, even! There is n’t a single foreign hotel label on any of them. That’s enough of itself to prove you know the Continent thoroughly. And you never speak a word of French or Italian, either. You are fibbing, Mr. Smagg!”

“Oh, I’ve known a lot of people who can speak French, although they’ve lived years in Paris,” said Dolly.

“You watch him,” said Lady Méchante. “Wait till we get out of Bronx Park.”

They did watch him, but through a plate glass window, for Smagg, announcing that he was tired of women, and that Mrs. Van Dream’s odor of Santal made him sick, rang the electric bell, told the chauffeur to stop, got out, banged the door, and took the seat beside Bradford.

They had gone a little way farther when a trunk dropped off the rear of the car. Smagg, defying the chauffeur’s polite protest, insisted upon getting out himself to lift it on the rack. The trunk had fallen in a pool of oily tar, which covered the road, and Smagg’s hands, for the first time in a month, became actually dirty. With a careless, unconscious gesture he wiped them off roughly on the seat of his light, pearl-colored worsted trousers. He climbed into the front seat again and began to bully the chauffeur, urging him to go faster and run over as many hens as possible. He tried to



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induce Bradford to let him take the wheel himself, but Bradford's eyes grew as cold as steel.

Within, Lady Méchante's glance never left him. Just this side of Portchester a front tire blew out with an explosion like a pistol shot. Bradford did not decline Smagg's aid this time, and the two of them worked for half an hour in the sun with a refractory shoe before it was clinched and fastened and the inner tube pumped up. Smagg insisted upon doing most of the hard work, and by the time the job was finished the knees of the light pearl worsted trousers aroused Dolly Van Dream's mirth. Smagg had doffed his coat and had laid it on the asphalt. When he put it on there was a large oily X on the small of its back. There was oil, also, upon Smagg's arms and under his left eye; his hair lacked that slick assurance of arrangement and particularly the curl that Lady Méchante had ever objected to, and which she had named the "hoodlum twist."

But somehow Smagg himself seemed rejuvenated, happier, and more buoyant. The terrific oaths which had caused Mrs. Van Dream hurriedly to pull up the sash in the door had ended. Smagg clapped the chauffeur lustily upon the back and invited him to a saloon just visible up the street. Wrestling Brewster Bradford, looking fearful and embarrassed, accompanied him. Lady Méchante jumped up and opened the door, about to call them back, but Mrs. Van Dream pulled her down.

When they returned, Smagg strutted. His eyes were light and his spirit was strong. In his mouth was a smack of beer — the first he had tasted since he had sold his soul into slavery. Hilariously he hopped upon the seat and bade the chauffeur chase himself. On they sped along the Old



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Boston Road, while Smagg laughed and sang aloud and told infamous tales to the descendant of the Pilgrims.

The road was narrow and wound in sharp curves up and down hill. Smagg lurched from side to side, not drunk, but exhilarated. That touch of hops was working in him mysteriously. The sight of his dirty hands had begun to call up memories of freedom, careless joyance. The very smears on his clothes thrilled him with forgotten delights. He had sweated with his labor, the first manual work he had done for long, and now the cool breeze caressed his damp temples. He turned round and gazed in through the plate glass window at Lady Méchante with a yellow glow in his eyes like a tiger's. The car suddenly came to a stop and Smagg looked round.

They were at the bottom of a sharp curving rise in the narrow road, and a hundred feet ahead he saw a coal wagon with one hind wheel off, overturned on the road. Its cargo had escaped in a huge pile that entirely filled the thoroughfare. With such narrow passage and the up grade, it was impossible to pass. The only way round, the chauffeur informed him, had diverged ten miles behind them. What was to be done?

Haulick Smagg was equal to the emergency. He left the car and strode up to the driver, who was sitting in the shade of the wagon waiting for reinforcements.

"Got a shovel?" said Smagg.

"I got a shovel all right. What d' ye want with it?"

"I want to move this coal," said Smagg.

"Go on, you can't shovel coal!" the driver mocked.

"You're nothing but a gentleman!"

"A what?" said Smagg.

"A gent—" The driver got no further, for Smagg's

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heavy hand had closed his mouth. The driver got up as far as his knees, but was promptly knocked down again.

Smagg seized a shovel, looked it over carefully, hefted it with delicate appreciation, then brandished it aloft like a battle-axe rescued from his grandsire's tomb. He thrust it at the hillside as if he would move the mountain; he chopped out a piece of cloud from the sky and tossed it over his shoulder into the Atlantic, miles away. Then, in a Berserk fury, he attacked the coal.

The yellow car drew stealthily and cautiously up to watch his labor.

The lumps flew steadily from his shovel in a sparkling cascade. He stood in the middle of the pile, knee deep, and his weapon scooped and thrust with lightning-like regularity. He was like a human engine, revolving at the rate of a hundred strokes a minute. Occasionally, in the wantonness of his joy, he would hurl a shovelful high over his head, or toward the Van Dreams' car. He began to wallow to right and left, ploughing furrows in the anthracite. He had stripped off his coat at the beginning, and soon he tore off his vest, plucked out a striped Madras shirt and threw it away. In short-sleeved undershirt at last, and with his pink satin suspenders knotted round his waist for a belt, he rested for a moment and looked about him in ecstasy.

Lady Méchante had already left the car and stood watching him, fascinated. Dolly stood on the running board, the tail of her skirt held firmly by Mamma Van Dream, her eyes fixed on the laborer. Wrestling Brewster Bradford, in his leathern coat, gazed impassively at the exhibition.

The pile was lowered to half its height now, and a dusty smoke enveloped the heroic figure. His neck and head



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and arms were bathed with sweat. It had caught the drifting particles and colored him with a light coat of black. From his hands to his elbows he was like a negro. He went to work still more savagely. The beer sang in his veins. It felt good to sweat. The lust for labor became a passion. He looked neither to right nor left, only at the diminishing talus beneath his feet. He was at home again, he who had sold this precious, grimy birthright for a mess of verbiage.

Dolly Van Dream could stand it no longer. With a wrench she tore herself free, leaving a handful of écu Valenciennes in old lady Van Dream's clutch, and sprang forward to the bottom of the heap of coal. In her breath, also, something new fluttered. There was a wild excitement there, conjured by the strangeness of the sight.

She had never seen a man work before — at least, never a man she had known — and to see Smagg's titanic toil moved her potently. More than this, the pristine power of the primitive appealed to her soul. The immemorial desire for man's mastery agitated her woman's heart. Primordial and paramount, in this magnificent exhibition of physical endeavor, she perceived Smagg as a man, a mate, a master, a demigod. With a wild, stifled cry on her lips, she waded up through the lumps that shifted and slid beneath her feet, reached him and threw her arms about his neck.

"Haulick," she sobbed, "you are magnificent! I love you! I accept you! I'll give you your answer now!" And she held her lips to his.

With a consummate Delancey Street oath, he hurled her to the bottom of the pile. Then he shook his fist over her prostrate form.

"Accept me, do you?" he thundered. "I would n't

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marry you, you broom-haired doll, for a ton of coal! I'm through with yer, an' yer whole crowd! The whole thing's a sham from top to bottom. There ain't a real man or a real woman north of Fourteenth Street! I've had enough of society; I'm on to it now! You're all doing what you don't want to do, an' thinking what you're told to think, an' saying what the rest say, an' paying four times what everything's worth to make a show. What I want is men and women with blood in their necks! When I want a wife, I'll get somethin' beside a corset and a lot of false hair and a visiting-card."

He turned his head slowly and beheld Lady Méchante, who stood in the posture of an attendant angel, but with an amiable devil looking out of her eyes. Her hand was slightly outstretched, the fingers tentatively extended as if awaiting him. Fragile and dainty and delicate as she was, one could perceive that her soul was as tense as a tightly coiled spring. She was quiet, with the quiet of a rapidly revolving wheel. One could almost see her aura, faintly luminous, enshrouding her. For a moment she stood there, a living miracle of loveliness and grace; then she reached forth her hand and she spoke, scarcely above her breath:

"Haulick Smagg, — come! I want you!"

He waded to her and put his arm about her waist.

"I know!" she said. "I have dwelt in your world, too. You have proved yourself and you are mine. Come, and let me come with you, back to freedom, back to truth, back to reality, back to Delancey Street and the Submerged Tenth." She drew a lace pocket handkerchief from her purse, wiped off his lips, and kissed him.

Dolly Van Dream had risen to her feet and stood streaked from chin to toe with coal dust. Wrestling





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Brewster Bradford came running up to help her. As she turned to him, her eye caught sight of a red and blue button in his buttonhole.

“The Loyal Legion,” she gasped.

He tore off his leather coat, unbuttoned his jacket, and smiled. There was an eagle pendant on the end of his watch chain.

“My God! The Society of the Cincinnati! Is it possible that you are a gentleman? Oh, take me away from this monster!”

He drew her gently away from the wreck, hurried her into the limousine, jumped to his seat, and started the machinery. The car plunged forward. The exhaust barked like musketry, and with a fierce burst of speed the vehicle jumped at the coal pile, crushed through it, and swept up the hill out of sight.

“Now that we are alone,” said Lady Méchante, “you may kiss me. Kiss me like a cave man, Haulick, if you will! Kiss me as I’ve never been kissed before, then take me by the hair of my head and drag me into your cave!”

* * * * *

When it was over, Haulick Smagg looked about and perceived two horses, black Percherons, tethered to a tree. He walked over to them, drawing a knife from his pocket as he went.

Lady Méchante looked up the hill toward the cloud of dust, raised by the flying wheels of the Van Dreams’ limousine. Softly she spoke to herself, as the cloud thinned and floated away into space:



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“From the partial impact of two dead stars new worlds are born!”

Haulick Smagg came forward, sitting his ponderous black Percheron. Gently he stooped; lightly he lifted her to a seat in front of him. Then he dug his heels into the horse's flanks.













